

No 17

5 cents

# WIDE AWAKE

A COMPLETE STORY **WEEKLY** EVERY WEEK.

## THE KEG OF DIAMONDS; OR, AFTER THE TREASURE OF THE CALIPHS.

*By TOM DAWSON.*



"He has dug excellently," sneered Ali Abba. "Since we must keep the keg, let him have the hole for himself!" All in an instant Phil realized that this was no grim jest, but that he was to be buried alive!



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## The Keg of Diamonds

OR,

### AFTER THE TREASURE OF THE CALIPHS

By **TOM DAWSON**

#### CHAPTER I.

##### MISCHIEF BREWING IN THE DESERT.

"I don't like the way these Arabs are acting," declared Phil Winston.

"Nor I, by a long sight," muttered Vance Carroll.

"Why, I have seen nothing wrong about their conduct," asserted the professor.

It was one of the professor's oddities, by the way, that, when he saw nothing wrong, there wasn't and couldn't, be anything that really was wrong.

But that was what came of being a professor!

The three Americans were the only people of their nation in all that part of the great country of Arabia.

Most Americans, by the way, think of Arabia as a little country somewhere down on the Red Sea, where Moses led the hosts of Israel across.

Arabia being a country some thirteen hundred miles one way, by fifteen hundred the other way, would fill a space equal to a very large slice of the United States.

These Americans had dropped down in the land of the Arab on business that shall be explained immediately.

From Aden they had journeyed up the Red Sea on a tramp steamer, and had been put ashore at a little town on the bleak coast of the Yemen, or southerly Red Sea district of Arabia.

There, through a local native official, they had secured six Arabs, led by one of their number, Bojee, who was a skilful pilot of the great deserts inland from the mountains.

Horses and camels for beasts of burden had also been rented for this strange expedition.

They had toiled up over the bleak red sandstone mountains that lined the coast.

They had descended the more fertile slopes of these same mountains on the inland side, and now they were on the great table-land of desert beyond the mountains.

Two weeks they had been out from the shore, and had traveled but a little over a hundred miles.

But now that they had struck the level desert, these American travelers hoped to move much faster.

"You shall travel as the bird flies," Bojee had promised them in his flowery Arab way.

It was just before dark now. Soon after sun-up they had started, traveling until ten in the morning.

Then they had halted through the heat of the day, starting on their way once more at four in the afternoon.

At a little before seven they had halted at this oasis, where there was a well of rather stagnant water, two score of palm trees, and coarse grass enough to feed their animals.

Here the camp was pitched.

It consisted of a large, dirty-white tent for our travelers, a smaller tent in which Bojee and his five companions herded, and a shelter flap to protect their food supplies and baggage from the sun.

Bojee and his men were mounted on very fair Arab steeds.

Phil, Vance, and the professor also were mounted on hired horses.



In addition there were three camels to serve as baggage carriers.

"I am sure I have noticed nothing wrong with our excellent Arab servitors," went on Prof. Briggs, as he and the boys strolled away from the camp over the hot sands.

"I have," Phil answered, decidedly.

"What, for instance?"

"Well, in the first place, they are uneasy."

"So am I," sighed the professor. "With all this hot sand, thickly populated by tantalizing insects, I don't see how any sane being can help being uneasy."

"Oh, pshaw! They don't mind a few sand fleas, professor. That isn't the kind of uneasiness I mean. But these fellows talk and mutter much among themselves, and look at us."

"Then, when we go near them," took up Vance Carroll, "the fellows stop their talking."

"That they may the better listen for orders, perhaps," hinted the professor.

"It doesn't look like that," contended Phil.

"Then what does it look like, my boy?"

"If those dark-skinned rascals aren't plotting some kind of mischief between themselves, then I'm a bad judge of appearances," asserted Phil.

"But what plans can they have against us?" insisted the professor, who was a middle-aged man with a positive way of speaking.

"These Arabs are casting a good many more glances at our baggage than they used to, professor," put in Vance.

"I suppose," mused the professor, "that they wonder why sane men think they need so much baggage."

"And they look especially, sir," added Phil, "at the long cylinder in which you have told them you carry the telescope with which you mean to look at the stars."

"I suppose their untrained, ignorant minds are more or less awed by the idea of scientific instruments," murmured Briggs.

"That isn't it—not a bit," retorted Vance, shaking his head very positively.

"Then what, my boy?"

"At the very least, sir, they're wondering whether there is anything in the baggage that it will be worth their while to steal."

"Oh, pooh, pooh!" returned the professor, growing almost heated. "Why, the native governor at the town where we landed assured us that these were honest men."

"Honest, as Arabs go," smiled Phil.

Professor Briggs wheeled upon our hero, surveying him very impressively.

"My young friend, let me assure you that the Arabs are a very, very old people, and that they have a high sense of honor."

"An Arab sense, eh?" smiled Phil, still unconvinced.

"Er—er—of course, their sense of honor is founded on their own notions of honor. Of course!"

"Exactly, sir," flashed back Phil, exultantly. "And these Arabs with us belong to the Bedouin class—the

desert wanderers. As far back as history goes they have always been known as great hands at robbing caravans."

"But not the caravans that they were hired to guard!" protested the professor, in a shocked voice.

"I don't believe they'd make a heap of distinction about that," proclaimed Phil, stubbornly. "But whatever they are thinking about so hard, professor, I'm still sure that you'll find them playing some shabby trick on us."

"I hope you're not a prophet, then," replied the professor, a serious look coming into his face as he came to a halt under a solitary date palm that stood at a distance of an eighth of a mile from the edge of the oasis on which the camp was pitched.

Now that the sun had gone down, dark was rapidly coming on, as it does in the low tropics.

Over at the edge of the oasis a fire glowed red through the darkness.

One of Bojee's men was cooking the simple supper of the travelers.

Vance Carroll walked slowly away, but Phil seated himself on the sand beside their teacher.

"Surely," murmured the professor, "you don't think that these Arabs suspect the real reason of our visit to this country. We have told them that we have come out here into the desert to observe certain stars with our telescope."

"They may believe that," assented Phil, but his tone implied a strong doubt that the Arabs had been so easily taken in.

"But these fellows are ignorant and unlettered. These Bedouins do not read or write," argued the professor. "So surely they have never heard of the diamonds of the famous caliphs of Jokwat."

"Sh!" warned Phil, looking swiftly, uneasily around.

"There's no one near us except Vance," returned the professor, lightly.

"There doesn't appear to be anyone, you mean," filled out Phil.

But Prof. Briggs was so certain there could be no spies within earshot that he went on:

"These Arabs have some traditions that are handed down by word of mouth, to be sure. But their traditions do not go back of the time of Mohammed. Now, how long ago did the last caliph, or sultan, of Jokwat flourish?" quizzed the professor, in the same tone that he would have used with his class at the Alger Academy.

"The last caliph of Jokwat died some three hundred years before the prophet Mohammed was born," Phil answered, correctly.

"Exactly. And Jokwat is to-day only a name. Only a few of the Mohammedan priests, here and there, would know what you meant by the name. Now, as diamonds are no part of the gem production of Arabia, how did this great collection of bright, sparkling stones come into the possession of the caliphs of Jokwat?"

"Why, Arabia has always been famous for its pearl fisheries along the shores of the Red Sea," Phil answered.



"So the caliphs having seen some diamonds that traders brought from India, became crazy to own a lot of the bright stones. They sent barrels and barrels of Arabian pearls to India, and brought back diamonds."

"What happened to the great state of Jokwat that once flourished in Arabia?" went on the professor.

"Why, the caliph of Hanfez, another Arabian state, heard about the marvelous Jokwat collection of diamonds, and made a demand for some of them, and that led to a war between the rival caliphs."

"What happened then?"

"Jokwat fell, and its last caliph was killed. But before he went under that caliph had the diamonds hidden so securely out here in the desert that the conquerors from Hanfez never got a glimpse of the sparklers."

"Go on with this most interesting history," desired the professor.

"After the fall of the last caliph of the state of Jokwat," Phil resumed, as if he were reading from a text-book, "the story of the diamonds was gradually forgotten. So far as is known by travelers of to-day, no mention of the famous Jokwat diamonds exists among the Arabian writers."

"Then how is their presence known to-day?"

"That," returned Phil, his eyes flashing with pride, "is where my family began to get busy."

"How?"

"My uncle once crossed this district of Yemen. His Arabs were digging near an old ruin, in the hopes of striking water. They had the well almost finished when they paused to rest through the heat of the day. My uncle Ben, glancing down into the hole, saw something glisten that made him take notice at once.

"Jumping into the hole, he found that something bright to be a large, pure, valuable diamond. It was set in the cover of a parchment manuscript, written in old Arabic characters."

"And your uncle couldn't read the language?"

"Not a word!"

"What did he do then?" persisted the professor, as if he were hammering a lesson into a dull pupil.

"Why," retorted Phil, proudly, "my uncle Ben wasn't as much of a fool as he might have been. He stopped the men from digging further, telling them that the water that would be found below would be most unhealthful. He made them fill the hole up instead of digging further."

"And your uncle's next move?"

"Why, he knew that that book, with its cover set with a diamond worth at least thirty thousand dollars, must have some information in it worth something."

"So he got the book translated?" insisted the professor.

"Not by a hanged sight he didn't!" blurted Phil. "There was where he was less of a fool than I may have been. Uncle Ben, though past fifty, started in right away to learn Arabic. By and by, when he could, he translated that manuscript on parchment. It was a history of the diamonds of the caliphs of Jokwat. It also stated that the

diamonds, put up in bags of skins, were buried six feet below the book.

"That was enough for Uncle Ben. He had sold the diamond, and had money enough for another trip into Arabia. So out here he hiked, with an expedition something like ours. But he was a crafty one, uncle Ben was, so he told these Bedouins that he thought of turning Mohammedan, and said he wanted to be alone near the old ruin, to pray for a week with his face to Mecca.

"So his escort left him there near the old ruins of one of the country places of the Jokwat caliphs. In a week the escort came back. Uncle Ben had found the diamonds, though the skins in which they had been planted had rotted to dust. He gathered up the diamonds, put them in a water-keg, and then planted them again."

"And a lucky thing he did," assented the professor, eagerly.

"It sure was," Phil rejoined. "For when the escort came back they had with them some sort of a native governor. Uncle Ben had some sort of a row with that governor—emir, I believe they call a governor in this hot, worthless country. Uncle Ben was lucky enough to get off out of the country with his life, but the diamonds were left behind in the buried keg.

"That wasn't the end of Uncle Ben's hard luck. He got off on a steamer, with his trunk and the old parchment manuscript. On the steamer he wrote down, in the same old Arabic, a short account of his own doings. Before he had finished writing, though, he came down with some sort of a fever he had caught out here in the desert.

"Uncle Ben was out of his head when he reached Aden. He died in that town. His trunk went to the customs house. There, for some reason, it lay year after year, but finally was opened. The customs house people notified the United States consul, who, finally, through Washington, discovered that I was the only living relative and heir of Uncle Ben.

"And poor little I was at the Alger Academy, getting education thanks to the fact that Uncle Ben had left me some money which must have been a part of what he got from the sale of that great diamond."

"And now the story is a short one," almost cooed Professor Briggs.

"Yes," laughed Phil. "Probably I wasn't as bright as Uncle Ben, for when that trunk came to me and I struck the old writing and guessed that it was Arabic, I brought the old parchment and Uncle Ben's newer writing to you, as a scholar in that language."

"And I told you, honestly enough, what the writing was, didn't I?" demanded Professor Briggs, warmly.

"That you did, Prof. You used me square."

"And I proposed that we drop everything else, and come out here at once to look up a treasure that must be worth millions."

"That was your proposal," smiled Phil. "But I'd have come, anyway."



"And I agreed to put up half the money for the expenses?"

"That also is true—quite true, Prof."

"And then came the rather remarkable part of it all," hastened on Briggs. "You picked out the poorest boy at the academy—a youngster who couldn't put up a single cent, and insisted that he must go with us, and share whatever we might realize out of this strange expedition."

"Why, I couldn't do anything different," cried Phil, warmly. "Vance Carroll may be poor, but he's one of the best, grittiest, staunchest, truest fellows that ever lived."

"A very admirable youth, indeed," nodded the professor."

"And he's my chum, besides," Phil went on, almost hotly. "Whatever luck I have is part his, in anything, just as he always shared even an apple with me."

"A regular modern instance of the ancient chum-ship of Damon and Pythias," smiled Professor Briggs. "However, it can do no harm at all to have a third person in to share the great luck with us. Unless your Uncle Ben was one of the greatest liars that ever——"

"Which he wasn't!" broke in Phil Winston, rising with a snap.

"Of course he wasn't," admitted the professor. "And so, when we reach the oasis of Ringmur——"

"Which is a hundred and ten miles further on."

"Why, then," finished Professor Briggs, triumphantly, "we're pretty sure to dig up the keg of diamonds—the famous, marvelous and wonderfully hidden treasure of the caliphs of Jokwat!"

"Hadn't we better be going back to camp, professor?" hinted Phil, again peering around through the darkness.

They started off. Soon after they had gone, a figure rose out of a burrow in the desert sand.

The figure was that of a man clad in turban, a long, flowing white robe, and red leather sandals.

The figure of Bojee, the leader of their Arab escort.

And Bojee's dark eyes were glowing strangely, as if he had heard every word uttered by the treasure-hunting Americans who had hired this Bedouin, this rough man of the desert—this robber at times!—this Bedouin whom the Americans had hired to guard them from the very dangers of the great Arabian desert!

## CHAPTER II.

### THE TRICKERY OF THE NIGHT.

"Vance, old fellow, where were you?"

Phil put the question as Carroll joined his two friends at the little folding table on which the simple supper had been set by the light of candles.

"Oh, taking a walk," said Carroll, briefly.

"Is it interesting out on the desert after dark?" inquired Professor Briggs.

"Not very," replied Vance, quietly.

"Did you think it would be?"

"I didn't know."

"So you went for a walk, in order to find out, did you?" quizzed the professor, smiling slightly.

"I—I wanted to be by myself," spoke Vance Carroll, shortly.

"Oh, a headache?"

"Close your face tight!" ordered Vance, looking briefly at the old man.

Professor Briggs fairly gasped.

What! One of his pupils dare to address him in such language as this!

"You must have a grouch on, Vance," laughed Phil.

"Put a padlock on your teeth, both of you," rejoined Carroll, now smiling pleasantly at them both.

"But your very extraordinary——" began the professor, sputtering.

"Slang is sometimes more useful than a choice of words that is too apparent to eavesdroppers," went on Vance, without looking at either.

But Phil understood in a twinkling now.

Vance wanted to stop the questioning of himself that had been started, and he was trying to say so in a kind of English that Bojee could not understand.

"Professor," began our hero, "I begin to think I'm next. Are you?"

"Next?" repeated Briggs, more mystified than ever.

But Phil, rising to reach across the table for something, managed to scowl into Briggs' eyes and whisper:

"Hush! Be discreet!"

"If to-day's journey is as hot as yesterday's was," went on Vance, trying to change the subject instantly, "we shall be glad of less travel, and more rest."

"Undoubtedly," murmured Briggs, though he was still far from understanding or forgiving what had seemed very much like an insult from our hero's chum.

The meal was finished, however, without any more friction.

Long before they left the table, however, Phil Winston located the spot where Bojee sat on the ground, back in the shadow, his eyes fixed gleamingly on them.

"Suppose we all try a stroll, professor?" hinted Phil, as they rose from the table.

The three stepped just beyond the fringe of camp-light.

Yet, out there in the darkness they could look back.

They could see Bojee and all five of his men, now, within the circle of light.

"I didn't mean to be rude, profesor," began Vance, in a low tone. "But I saw that Bojee had his eyes on us, and I didn't want to have him suspect that I had seen."

"You saw what?" demanded Briggs.

"That Bojee heard your whole conversation with Phil!"

Our hero fairly gasped.

"You don't mean that, Vance!"

"But I do!"



"You mean the conversation that the professor and I had while sitting out there under that solitary date tree?"

"He heard you," Vance declared, solemnly.

Phil looked in acute despair at Briggs.

"Pooh!" ridiculed the professor.

"You don't believe me?" flushed Vance.

"I know you mean to speak the truth, lad."

"You think I'm a fool, then?"

There was sometimes hot feeling between these two, Vance and Briggs.

So Phil made haste to pour oil on the waters.

"Tell us just what you mean, Vance, old fellow," begged our hero.

"You remember that I went off in the dark?" Vance demanded.

"Of course."

"At first I meant just to take a short stroll beyond where you were. But a little off to my left," explained Carroll, his face showing serious, indeed, "I saw a flutter of dirty white cloth. At first I didn't know but what it was some desert prowler. But I didn't make a sound. I just kept on."

"And then?"

Phil's voice was heavy with dread as he put the eager question.

"Why, then, as soon as I had gotten far enough away, the fellow's head being turned your way, I dropped to the ground."

"You could see the fellow in the sand near us?"

"Easily. You seemed to be talking. He lifted his head. He kept his head up, as if listening," Carroll went on, tremulously, "until you two rose and walked away."

"And then?"

"He lay as flat as he could, again, until you were some distance on."

"Then he was really listening," decided Phil, in a flash. "An honest man wouldn't have been afraid of being seen."

"Just the way I figured," nodded Vance.

"Could you see that it was Bojee?"

"No; it was too dark to make the fellow out."

"Then how do you know yet that it was Bojee?" demanded Briggs.

"Why, I followed him back to camp, at a safe distance through the dark," Vance Carroll answered. "When he got up close to the firelight I could make out, sure, that it was Bojee himself. And when he found I wasn't in camp he started curiously, and turned around, as if to see where I was."

The three looked anxiously at each other now.

Out here on the desert they were practically at the mercy of these Arabs.

Professor Brigg's face was the first to clear.

"Pooh!" he remarked.

Vance shot an indignant, questioning look at him.

"Oh, no; I'm not doubting your word, lad—not a bit. But I feel that you have taken a more serious view of the matter than is necessary. Undoubtedly Bojee just went

out on the sand to take a nap. He happened to wake in time to rise and seem to follow us in. But I am certain that he didn't hear a word of our conversation. We talked in very low tones, didn't we, Phil?"

"Not all the time," returned our hero, regretfully.

"Oh, well, you may be sure that Bojee, though he speaks some English fairly well, suspects nothing—knows nothing."

"If he does suspect," murmured Phil, tremulously, "we may be in a mighty bad way."

"You forget that we are armed," returned the professor, tapping at the butt of the revolver in a holster at his side.

"Oh, yes, we're armed," Phil admitted. "But, even so, we're three against six, and out here on a great, desolate desert that these men know like a book, while we couldn't get anywhere on it without them."

"Then you feel——" began Briggs.

"Uneasy!" returned the boy.

"What can we do, lad?"

"Keep our eyes open—that is all, I suppose."

"We can do better than that," hinted Briggs.

"How?" asked Phil.

"What?" challenged Vance, curiously.

"Follow me!"

"Well?" demanded both boys, in the same breath.

"Observe the best thing to do when in doubt."

"What——"

"Follow me," commanded the professor.

He marched stiffly back over the desert sand.

Phil and Vance looked swiftly at each other.

Then, hand in hand, they followed swiftly.

"Bojee!" called the professor.

"Your excellency!" promptly answered the chief of the escort.

Bojee hastened forward out of the shadow near where the animals were grazing.

The Arabs cultivate politeness as a fine art.

Bojee bowed before the professor as if before a mighty prince.

"Your excellency's commands?" he asked.

"Bojee," asked the wise man, fixing his gaze on the Arab's face, "we missed you a little while before the evening meal."

"I could not have been far away, excellency," responded the Arab, gravely.

"Just where were you, please?"

Still the Arab betrayed no surprise at the question.

"I was tired, excellency, so I slept," he answered, simply.

"Slept?" repeated Briggs, as if astonished.

"Even so, excellency," replied Bojee, gravely, and with every appearance of great honesty. "I was very tired. Still, if I did wrong and neglected the service of your excellency, I am sorry indeed."

"Where did you sleep, Bojee?" went on the wise man.

"Out on the desert sands, excellency."



"But just where?"

"Out a little way past that lone date palm, I think, excellency," the chief of the escort answered, pointing, and speaking softly.

"Did you sleep long?"

"Until after your excellencies had seated yourselves at the evening meal," Bojee replied.

"I am glad to know, for I missed you, and wondered," replied the professor, pleasantly. "That is all, Bojee. Unless you will have a cigar?"

The professor held out a Havana. These Arabs, though well supplied with pipe and cigarette tobacco, seldom taste cigars in the interior, and look upon them as a treat.

After the Arab, taking the cigar and bowing low in his thanks, had stepped off to light his prize, Professor Briggs strolled to the tent.

Neither Phil nor Vance followed immediately. Before they did enter the tent they made sure that none of the escort were prowling near.

"Well?" demanded the professor, in a triumphant whisper.

"Bojee seemed to answer straight enough," Phil replied.

"And he told the truth, too, lad! Now, a dishonest man, who had listened, would suspect that we knew."

"Maybe Bojee does suspect."

"He doesn't," retorted the wise man, firmly, "for the simple reason that the fellow didn't hear anything we said. His whole manner, and his simple honesty, proved that."

"Then you think I'm way off the track?" Vance inquired, in a low whisper.

"I'm sure of it!" came, with emphasis, from the professor.

"All right!" sighed Vance.

"But we will keep our eyes open, anyway," broke in Phil's low whisper.

Professor Briggs wandered outside again for his last cigar before turning in.

The boys followed, throwing themselves down on the coarse grass before the tent door.

Now that the sun was down for a couple of hours past it was almost cool, furiously hot though it had been during the day.

Caravans in Arabia often travel at night, the people preferring to sleep through the heat of the day.

But our friends, accustomed to night sleep all their lives, chose to be up at daylight, travel until the heat grew too intense, and then to finish the day's journey in the late part of the afternoon.

The clothing of these Americans was of the simplest.

At Aden they had chosen to buy the light-colored khaki which is used in the tropics by most of the armies of the world.

They wore light linen shirts and underwear, khaki trousers and blouses, light pith helmets, and sometimes khaki leggings.

It was the coolest and most enduring kind of garb for a journey like this over the desert of Yemen.

In addition, each sported a cartridge belt, well-filled, to which was also fastened a holster containing a good American six-shooter.

Their Arab escort were armed with long, keen knives, old-fashioned pistols, and long-barreled rifles, some of them antique flintlocks.

Yet, crude and old-styled as these rifle were, Bojee and his men could do some wonderfully straight shooting.

Like all Arabs, Bojee and his men were fearless and skillful horsemen. They could ride at a wild gallop, and yet shoot straight at a mark or at a foe.

"I'm going to turn in," sighed Phil, at last.

Unlacing his leggings and unlacing his shoes, he went slowly into the tent.

In another two minutes his clothes were off, and he lay on a heavy blanket and under a light one.

His revolver lay at the lower edge of his air-filled rubber pillow.

On the next blanket lay Vance Carroll.

Both youngsters were sound asleep by the time that Professor Briggs, his last cigar finished, came silently in to join them.

It was just after daylight that our hero awoke for the first time.

He had a dim notion that something was wrong, though just what it was he could not understand.

All was as silent in the camp as it was anywhere else out on that great desert.

Still, Phil Winston felt uneasy.

For greater security he thrust his right hand upward for his revolver—but did not find it there.

"Eh? What's that? Where is it?"

Phil thrilled with alarm as he sat up quickly.

He lifted his rubber pillow.

No sign of any revolver there!

Next his nervous hand sought under the blanket.

But no weapon there, either!

"Vance!" he throbbed, shaking his chum by the shoulder.

"Eh? What's——" Vance started to grumble, drowsily.

But Phil's hand was tightly over his chum's mouth.

Then Carroll woke up sufficiently to realize what a troubled look lay in Winston's eyes.

"See if you can find your revolver, Vance!" begged Phil.

Now Vance sat up like a flash, searching as Phil had done.

But not a sign was there of Carroll's weapon, that had been in place a few hours before.

The boys turned startled looks, wondering, yet significant, upon each other.

"I guess it's hardly worth while to ask Briggs if he has his shooting iron," whispered Phil, dryly.

"I will, though!"



And Vance stirred the sleeping professor. Briggs, with his fifty and more years, was a light sleeper.

He roused readily, without making a noise, and was quickly acquainted with the situation.

"By Apollo, boys," groaned Professor Briggs, his face whitening, as he sat up, "I begin to believe that you were right last night. It's no use to ask me where my pistol is."

"I'm going to ask someone who knows!" gritted Phil, springing up in his stocking feet.

"Eh? What?" demanded Vance, looking up.

Carroll started to rise, also, but our hero pushed him back.

"Stay where you are, old fellow!" quivered Winston. "One of us is enough to do the trick. Stay right where you are!"

Then, on tip-toe, Phil stole out into the early morning light.

As noiseless as some spectre, Phil crossed the hot sand in his stocking feet, not stopping until he reached the door of the tent used by the escort.

Peeping in, Phil Winston gave a start.

There, on the ground inside the tent, lay the three American revolvers.

Beside them knelt Bojee.

Phil's sharp gasp reached the Arab's sharp ears. He wheeled, leaped to his feet.

"I see you have our pistols here, Bojee," spoke our hero, trying to smile.

But Bojee met the American's gaze with a cool, easy smile, as he stepped to the door of the tent, barring our hero's way.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE DUSKY DIPLOMAT.

Bojee's black eyes were turned gravely on our hero's.

That dark face was calm. Even now Bojee was not forgetting at least the appearance of politeness that is drilled into the calm Arab.

"What does your excellency wish?" the fellow asked, in his deep, musical voice.

"Why, I missed my revolver," smiled Phil. "So I came to see if you knew anything about it. I see you have them all. Pass them to me, please."

But Bojee didn't stir.

Winston, glancing past the chief of escort, saw that the other Arabs were sitting up, close to the American fire-arms.

"Didn't you hear me?" insisted Phil, though still speaking pleasantly. "The pistols, please. You are not often as slow, Bojee."

But now, to our hero's great relief, the Arab stepped slowly back, bent, and picked up the revolvers.

"Beg pardon, excellency," spoke the fellow, softly. "I had hoped to return the weapons before you awoke. I

undertook to clean the pistols for you, and to put them in better condition."

"Why—Great Scott!" gasped Phil, startled out of his self-control, for, as he took his own weapon, happening to hold the hammer side downward, the hammer fell back loosely.

"What's wrong here, Bojee?" demanded the boy, quivering.

"I fear your excellency will not forgive me," replied the Arab, in his calmest voice. "I tried to strengthen the spring of the pistol, and I had the misfortune to break the spring."

"I should say you did!" Winston retorted, disgustingly. "And—by thunder!—you were as clumsy with the other revolvers."

"Your excellency cannot forgive my blundering now, I know," cried Bojee, in a polite, troubled voice. "But in time you will forgive your servant—when you learn how faithful he can be! From now on we—my men and I—will guard you as you have never been guarded before. Fear not; we are excellent shots, good riders, and know not fear when we serve princes like your excellencies!"

Bojee bowed low, but Winston, in his anger, and in the certainty that the Arab was inwardly laughing at him, could have kicked the fellow with good relish.

It wouldn't do, however, to show anger openly.

Gripping the three now worthless revolvers, Phil turned without a word, stalking back gloomily to the American tent.

"See!" he whispered, holding up the revolvers so that the hammers swung.

Then he threw the weapons down again.

Professor Briggs' face was utterly and hopelessly white with dread.

"What are we going to do, Winston?" faltered the wise man.

"We'll have to wait and see, I guess," replied the boy, with a dreary smile. "Whatever we do, we mustn't show fear. Smile, I say, and act as if the matter were of no consequence. And don't appear to watch the Arabs too closely."

Outside there were sounds and smells of preparing breakfast now.

Then one of the Arabs brought water, just as usual, for the Americans to wash.

Within fifteen minutes more breakfast was served on the folding table under a date palm.

Canned baked beans, canned brown bread, and fresh dates from the trees around—that was the meal that would have tasted primely good to Americans whose minds were easier on this sunny, warm morning.

"Bojee," spoke Phil, quietly.

"Excellency?" politely replied the chief of escort, appearing and bowing.

"I note that one of your men is gone, with his horse."

"Ah, yes, excellency—a misfortune."

"Misfortune?" repeated Phil.



"Yes; one of my best men became homesick. He refused to go further, and I could not force him to remain. But we are still five, and wholly at the service of your princely excellencies."

Three Americans heard with jumping hearts.

Bojee's grave, honeyed words could fool not one of them now.

A messenger had been sent off by the Arab who was now their master.

Where? For what purpose? They could not guess.

But all three realized that trouble was swiftly coming to a head.

While the three were eating the tents came down and were loaded on to the camels.

Then saddled horses were brought up.

As politely and respectfully as ever Arabs held the horses while the three Americans mounted.

Just as ever Bojee sent one of his armed men scouting a half a mile in advance of the little caravan.

Bojee himself rode, with one of his men, at the head of the caravan, while the remaining two brought up the rear with the camels.

Long strung out as the little procession was, the three Americans, riding together in the center, had chance to talk without being overheard.

"We've got enough to think about this morning," sighed Vance, sorrowfully.

"Yet what on earth are we to think?" throbbed Professor Briggs.

"For one thing," replied Winston, mighty soberly, "we can think just how foolish we were not to keep one of our number awake as a guard last night."

"But what is the future to be—for us?" asked the professor, anxiously.

"Heaven only knows," sighed Phil.

"It's a waiting game now—just!" voiced Vance, deliberately.

He spoke so coolly that the professor looked at him quickly.

The wise man felt a sudden respect for this boy, whom he had formerly rather looked down upon.

"You don't seem afraid, Carroll," remarked the older man.

"Afraid? No, I'm curious."

Phil shot a swift, gratified look at Briggs. He was proud of the chum whom he had been wise enough to take on this expedition.

\* \* \* \* \*

Something happened up front!

It was nearly ten o'clock in the morning.

Barely a mile away stood a fertile-looking little oasis, the grass and the trees of which proved that there must be a good well of water there.

But the Bedouin riding ahead as a scout had just come scurrying back on his Arabian horse.

He had halted and spoken a few words with Bojee.

Now that impassive, grave, calm chief had wheeled his horse around and had raised one hand.

"The signal to stop," announced Phil, reining up. "What does it mean? Have they seen something? It can't be danger—that is, not more than we're in from our own guard."

Bojee came slowly back on his walking horse.

"Excellency," he announced, soberly, "we halt here."

"Why not at the oasis?" Phil demanded.

"My men and I halt at the oasis, excellency. You and your friends stay here."

Though the words and tone were polite, there was an undercurrent of mockery in both that could not escape the Americans.

"What do you mean?" Phil cried, looking sharply at the fellow.

"We may have to part company now," Bojee announced, coolly.

"Oh!"

Phil leaned forward in saddle, looking the fellow keenly in the eyes.

"Bojee," spoke the boy, sternly, "I think we understand each other. There is no need to say more. We part? Very well. But we—my friends and I—will keep our own baggage."

"What does your excellency mean by that?" questioned the Arab, speaking haughtily at last.

"You are man enough of the desert, Bojee, to know that we cannot live here without our tent. We will take that from the camel. We need also the long glass by which we look at the stars by night. We will keep that also. The rest is yours."

"It is good," spoke the Arab, his eyes gleaming.

These fool Americans had forgotten to insist upon food or water.

Without these two necessities of the desert, they would very soon be where torment would force them to do anything that was ordered.

"So be it," pronounced Bojee. "You shall have your things."

He spoke to one of his men in Arabic, who made a camel kneel.

But Phil had ridden swiftly backward, after a flashing glance that forbade his friends to follow him.

Whump! Off came the big tent, landing in a bundle on the ground from the back of a kneeling camel.

"Careful with the great glass," rang Phil Winston's sharp voice, in which there was not a trace of fear.

He spoke so sharply that the Bedouins obeyed, lifting down to the ground with infinite care a long cylinder of leather.

It was more than eight feet in length, this leather case, and secured from prying eyes by three stout padlocks.

"The rest is yours, Bojee!" called our hero, as if anxious to be rid of the Bedouins.

And the petty chief, as if anxious to be rid of the Americans in turn, called out to his men.



They moved forward, the camels going with them.

"By Apollo! We are soon kicked out of our kingdom!" grunted Professor Briggs. "Yesterday we were princes; to-day we are vagrants, left to perish of hunger and thirst on the desert."

"We have at least one advantage," muttered Phil, tartly. "To-day we know our Arabs for just what they are worth. And we know what they think of us."

"All would have gone well enough," declared Vance, "if Bojee hadn't heard you talking last night."

Briggs winced. It had been his fault, that long talk under the date tree, for Phil had counselled silence.

"Going to put up the tent?" demanded the professor, turning to our hero, as if to change the subject.

"I'm waiting," returned Phil.

"For what?"

"I want to see if Bojee really means to halt his crowd at the oasis, and, if so, for how long he expects to stay there."

"We have the telescope with which to watch," smiled the professor, dryly, and then the three looked at each other queerly.

"We can thank the rascals for one thing, anyway," hinted Vance.

"Oh, indeed?" asked the professor, curiously.

"They might have shot us down like so many dogs," continued Carroll.

"Then they'd have been the goats," laughed Phil.

"Why?" queried Vance.

"Why, from all we hear, the oasis of Ringmur isn't exactly a small place. They may know that there's a keg of diamonds there, but suppose the oasis is two or three thousand acres big? One thing the professor and I didn't mention last night was the location of the spot where that keg is buried. We know that, of course, but we didn't mention it. So, if Bojee wants the keg of diamonds, perhaps he realizes that he needs us to find it for him."

"He took the wrong method, then," gruffed the professor.

"Not a bit of it," Phil denied warmly. "He has taken just the right course. He and his fellows ride forward to an oasis where water is abundant. We can stay here and look over where the water is, but we can't go there for our lives. Bojee knows that soon we'll beg for water on any terms. By thunder, I'm as dry as a fish already!"

"There they are, over at the oasis now!" cried Vance, pointing at the caravan that lately had been theirs.

"And there goes one of Bojee's men, riding southward like mad," puzzled the professor. "Now, what——"

"There's the answer to the south," supplied Phil, wheeling and pointing.

Over a ridge in the endless sand of the desert appeared a long line of animals.

Half a dozen riders, well spread out, came first. They rode like skirmishers or scouts, and were perhaps a mile and a half away.

Then, slowly, behind them, came into sight some thirty horsemen.

Nor did this body of irregular Bedouin cavalry conceal the long line of camels and walking drivers that moved along at the rear.

"A caravan, and a jolly big one!" glowed Phil.

"Heaven grant there are white men there, who'll take kindly to us!" throbbed Vance.

Motionless in their saddles sat the three Americans, watching the oncoming line with fascinated gaze.

The scouts were riding at a slow trot, the caravan behind coming on at a walking gait.

"Bojee is afraid the newcomers may spoil some of his tricks," proclaimed Phil, watching, eagerly. "That's why he has sent one of his men—to find what's in the wind!"

"If it's help for us it never can be more welcome," sighed Professor Briggs.

Bojee's rider had just fired his rifle in the air.

It was answered in similar fashion by the nearest scout of the onmoving caravan.

Then the scout who had answered rode forward at a gallop to meet Bojee's messenger.

The two riders met, both moving at a gallop, and circled around each other in true Bedouin fashion.

"Now they're halting and pow-wow-ing," breathed Phil Winston. "By jove, it's soon over, though! See those scouts turn and wave their guns. And—gracious! What's up now?"

Phil and his companions were gasping. With mighty good cause, too, seemingly.

For suddenly the score and a half of horsemen at the head of the caravan were moving swiftly forward to join the scouts.

"See that one chap shoot ahead on his horse—the sheik, the chief?" throbbed Phil. "By thunder, they're wheeling this way, coming on at a gallop—and spreading out as if for a charge!"

A charge, indeed. For now the fast-moving body of Arab horsemen, after brandishing their muskets, lowered the muzzles and fired—straight at the Americans.

"We're out of range yet," throbbed young Winston. "But, by crackey! we won't be in three minutes more! They mean murder!"

Firing and yelling, the Bedouin cavalry of the desert rode on—a cyclone of horse and man!

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### "HUNK" WITH BOJEE.

"This isn't a circus, and it's time we woke up!" panted Phil Winston, slipping down from his horse.

Like a panther he leaped for the long leather case.

Vance Carroll was at his side before Professor Briggs came to his senses.



"Get the padlocks off as quick as we can," cried Phil. They had them off in a jiffy.

"Catch, Prof.!" thrilled Winston, tossing an object through the air.

It fell upon the sand, but Briggs quickly had the article in his hands.

It was about as neat an automatic magazine gun as ever a maker of firearms turned out.

"Cartridges!" clicked Winston, racing up and pressing a box into his old teacher's hands.

He and Vance were provided with similar automatic guns.

Shorter even than cavalry carbines, and weighing not more than six pounds each, these little rifles were deadly and perfect as a means of defence.

Down in the rather bulky stock each of these automatics carried twenty-five small cartridges.

Small though the cartridges were, they had "stopping power" and carried further than the cartridges of the United States army.

Click! click! click! These three Americans, the only ones of their kind out on the great, vast desert, and depending only upon themselves for their safety, slipped the clips of cartridges rapidly into magazines.

"Open up at once, and for business!" cried Phil.

"Kill at the first shots?" demanded the professor.

"Bring down horses! Don't hit men, if you can help it!" commanded young Winston. "Don't waste any shots, either."

Not one of the three paid any heed to his abandoned horse now.

These creatures, wholly used to the strange life of the desert, were standing still, awaiting the pleasure of their riders.

It was not a volley that rang out from the automatic rifles.

The noise couldn't be compared to that.

It was more like a series of small sputters.

The Americans, dropping to their knees, fired a few shots apiece as rapidly as they could take good aim.

Nor was truer shooting pieces ever made than these.

Though the distance to the nearest of the on-rushing horsemen was still nearly three-quarters of a mile, fully one in four of the American shots told.

Horse after horse dropped and rolled over, unseating his rider.

"Eight down, isn't it?" called Phil, gleefully. "That'll make 'em pause. And, if there's anything that breaks a Bedouin's heart, it's to have his horse spoiled for him! See, those rascals are halting in confusion. I wonder how our old friend, Bojee, takes all this?"

Chuckling, Phil wheeled around on his knees.

There, fully a mile away, sat Bojee, stock-still on his horse, which, at the distance, looked the size of a goat.

"Just a few shots for Bojee, to cheer him up!" trilled Winston.

Again the series of sputters, and in the midst of it

Bojee's horse was seen to roll and fall, the beast's rider leaping to his feet, then crouching.

"That's about hunk with Bojee for the present," chuckled Winston. "So hold up."

"What's the matter with trying for a few of the caravan's camels, just to show those fellows what fine range we command?" quizzed eager Vance.

"I'd like to," snapped Phil, "but we won't. In the first place, we might hit some human being in the caravan, and those people haven't done anything wrong to us yet. In the second place, while we've got these dandy automatics, still we mustn't get a dippy idea that we're equal to an army. We don't want to rile these people too much, for we can't afford to make enemies out here on this dreary old desert."

"That looks like a flag of truce," reported the professor, calling attention to one of the horsemen of the caravan, who, having tied his unwound white turban to the muzzle of his musket, was now riding forward, waving the white thing.

"Let him come, then, for he's alone," ordered Phil.

"I wonder if there are any of our kind of people with that caravan?" pondered Vance aloud.

"Easy enough to find out, isn't it?" demanded Phil, smiling. "You and Prof. get out the telescope and the tripod and mount it. Then you can peep right into the heart of the caravan."

As his two friends set to work carrying out this suggestion, Phil, with the automatic carbine resting across the hollow of his left arm, watched the on-coming of the bearer of truce.

From the very outset the Americans had wisely concealed from Bojee the existence of the automatics, which had been kept securely locked in with Briggs' telescope.

Had it been known that our Americans were well prepared for long-range fighting, the Arabs would have been suspicious at the very outset that the expedition was of a more important and dangerous kind than a mere observation of the stars from the desert.

"Peace be with you, brethren!" bellowed the on-coming rider in Arabic as he drew near, still at a gallop.

"And with you, noble sheik!" (chief) answered Phil, in the same tongue.

On the long journey from the United States the professor had been teaching his young comrades as much Arabic as they could master.

"You have been ruining our horses," cried the Arab, reining up and dismounting.

As he did so the fellow, a handsome, dark-skinned, tall and powerfully built Arab of forty, threw his gun on the ground as a sign of peace and of trust in his present companions.

"But, noble sheik," protested Phil, "your men rode at us as if they intended mischief."

"It was simple powder-play—a salute," replied the sheik. "We did you no harm."

"You were out of range," said Phil, drily.



"Then you suspected us, excellency?" quizzed the Arab, gravely.

"We did not know what to think, oh noble sheik."

"I declare to your excellency that we do not seek to harm you."

"That is well," Phil smiled, coolly, "for, if you sought to harm us, most noble sheik, we have weapons that would lay your caravan low."

"I have never seen the like of such weapons," went on the Arab, curiously, as he dismounted. "May I look at one?"

"Our noble brother will pardon us if we do not let him take one in his own hands," rejoined Phil, drawing back a couple of steps.

Bowing, gravely, the sheik stood where he was, though his gaze still rested on the weapon in Phil's hands.

"What manner of caravan is yours?" questioned our hero.

"A slave caravan, bound through to Tiflis, Persia," came the unexpected answer.

All three of the Americans made their surprise and disgust plain in an instant.

"Then that infamous trade still flourishes in Arabia?" gasped Phil.

"Infamous?" asked the Arab, in amazement. "I do not understand your excellency's word."

"It doesn't matter," our hero retorted, drily.

Then he glanced swiftly at Vance, a new idea popping into our hero's mind.

"My noble brother, the sheik, knows that we could destroy many horses and camels of the caravan, if we chose?"

"And slaves, too, perhaps," admitted the sheik, scowling darkly.

"Then you would be willing to do us a slight service in return for kindness from us?" persisted young Winston.

"What is it that your excellency wants?"

"Does my brother, the sheik, know one Bojee?"

"I know the man your excellency names."

"You have many times as many men as Bojee, noble sheik. If we agree not to fire upon your horses and camels will you, in turn, agree to bring Bojee here—and alive?"

"Now, what is in your excellency's mind?" demanded the Arab, suspiciously.

"Bojee was our servant, and has played us a scurvy trick. We would punish him—that is all. And you will be good enough to bring Bojee here?"

"Punish him? How?" demanded the sheik.

"With the bastinado, as the fellow richly deserves," Phil explained, as coolly as a Bedouin could have spoken.

The sheik deliberated, scowling. Yet he was at the mercy of these Americans. They had already satisfied him that, with their rapid-firing rifles of great range, they could destroy most of his horses and camels—and perhaps many human beings—ere his own followers could get within battle range with their own old-fashioned muskets.

"You shall have Bojee," said the sheik, curtly, at last.

"Good enough! We'll wait for you here," smiled Phil.

"But do not allow any of your caravan to move back, or we shall feel that you do not trust us."

His eyes blazing, this sheik of the slave caravan rode off at a swift gallop.

Half a mile away, he was seen to beckon some of his men. Then a score of the slave caravan's Bedouins went scurrying over toward the oasis.

"Now, Prof.," cried Phil, exultantly, "kindly give the telescope a swirl that will make Bojee's emotions plain to us. For I'm thinking he's up against the surprise of his desert life."

"Here you are—and the rascal's well focussed," announced Briggs, a few moments later.

Grinning, Phil stepped to the eye-piece of the seven-foot telescope.

Those powerful lenses not only showed Bojee at close range, but much of the oasis around him as well.

Their late chief of escort, standing sorrowfully beside the wounded horse that he had been compelled to kill, stood curiously awaiting the coming of the slave sheik.

"They're meeting," reported Phil, watching with huge enjoyment. "Whee! isn't Bojee making a fine bow, though? And our sheik and his men—gracious! Three of 'em have jumped off and are seizing the wretch. By ginger! I'd like to hear what he's saying now. And his own men don't dare interfere—or, at least, don't think it wise to."

A minute later Phil reported, gleefully:

"Here comes Bojee on foot and an escort of the slavers behind him to see that he comes straight."

On came the party of mounted men, driving the petty sheik before them.

"I wonder if Bojee knows yet what he's up against," grinned Vance.

"Are you going to let that whole Arab escort come up with him?" asked the professor, uneasily.

"Of course not," clicked Phil. "Try a shot, please, Prof., and see if you can bring down a horse as a hint."

Within fifteen seconds one of the Arab horses toppled. Bojee's escort came to an instant halt.

There was a hurried consultation.

Then on came the slave sheik, alone, mounted and armed, his men returning toward their own caravan.

And even this sheik, as he came nearer, held his rifle aloft as a signal to the Americans, then dropped the gun to the sands and rode on without a rifle.

"That's near enough for you!" called Phil, as soon as the two sheiks were within hailing distance. "Let Bojee come on alone, while you dismount and stay where you are."

"Hold on!" quivered Vance. "You want the big sheik to apply the bastinado to the soles of the little sheik."

"Vance Carroll, you're a genius!" throbbed our hero, delightedly. "Of course that's the scheme—the only one in sight!"



So, in a twinkling, the late order was changed, and now both Arabs came forward, though the slaver left his musket on the sands behind him.

Bojee's manner was dignified but polite.

"What does your excellency wish of me?" he asked of Phil.

"Down on the sand with you!" Phil retorted, coolly.

Bojee drew back, a flush mounting to his forehead.

"Down with you!" insisted Winston.

"For what purpose, excellency?"

"That you shall soon find. Down with you, unless you want to see two caravans destroyed."

"Your princely excellency must not forget that I am a sheik," cried the fellow.

"If you are another second in falling on your face," threatened our hero, raising his automatic, then you will lose one of your camels.

It is by the camel that a man's wealth is measured in Arabia.

Bojee, not being a rich man, snorted, then threw himself forward on his face.

"As for you, sir," ordered Phil, turning to the slaver, "tie the fellow's hands."

"I? A sheik!" retorted the fellow, indignantly.

"Tie the fellow's hands unless you want to lose at once two or three of your camels."

Thereupon, the slaver got down upon his knees. With his own turban he tied Bojee's hands behind his back.

"Now, take off the fellow's shoes," Phil insisted, calmly.

"But what——" began the slaver, starting.

"Take the sandals off," repeated Phil, more sharply, reaching back for the stick that Vance brought to him. "Now, sheik, take this cudgel and give the fellow the bastinado in the shortest time you can!"

The slaver's face showed him to be in open revolt.

"Vance," murmured Phil, "take a straight sight at the nearest camel in the slave caravan. If I give the word, shoot—and don't miss!"

"Now, then," Phil roared, "the bastinado!"

Bojee did not appeal for mercy. After a moment's doubtful pause the slaver seized up the cudgel.

Slap! It was a feeble blow of the stick that landed on the bare soles of Bojee's feet, which the professor had just bound together.

"Harder!" commanded Winston, irritably. "If you don't do it hard enough, down you go yourself, sheik, and take the bastinado, too!"

Though the slaver's eyes flashed fire, he now obeyed by laying on the cudgel with a force that made prostrate Bojee grate his teeth.

"Harder!" quivered Phil, stamping his feet. "Harder!"

Then did Bojee get all that was due him.

The slaver's hardest blows tormented the prostrate one's soles until our hero had counted twenty-five blows.

"Stop!" requested our hero. "That's enough!"

"Too many, you shall find!" hissed Bojee.

"Give me that stick," requested our hero, turning curiously white.

Poising the cudgel, he stood over his late chief of escort.

"Bojee, you cannot talk to me like that. Now, I shall lay on the bastinado myself. Nor shall I stop until you ask for mercy. If my arms tire before your feet do, then one of my friends will take up the good work. Now, remember! You must beg for mercy before you get it!"

Chug! chug! sounded the cudgel, rising and falling in perfect time.

Nor did Phil count or pause, but went on laying on the stick until at last Bojee, frothing at the mouth, moaned:

"Mercy!"

"Do you beg for it?" demanded Phil, pausing with the stick uplifted.

"I beg, most generous prince!"

"You will never threaten again?"

"Never, excellency!"

"Nor try to work me any harm?"

"Never!"

"Bojee, I think I shall need your oath for that," announced Phil, deliberating.

"Then, excellency, I swear by the winds that I shall be your faithful dog from this hour."

"That oath won't do."

"By the woods, then, I swear!"

"That won't do, either. Bojee, swear by the honor of the Arabs!"

The slaver started. This is the strongest oath that can be required of a Bedouin.

Bojee, too, hesitated.

"More of the bastinado, then," asserted Phil, coolly.

"No, no, excellency, wait! By the honor of the Arabs, I swear!"

"Never to be my foe again?"

"Never to be your foe again, most generous prince!"

"You can set him free," nodded Phil, turning to the sheik of the slavers.

Bojee limped sadly as he got upon his feet. Hobbling, he stood there as if awaiting further orders.

"Excellency," he said, at last, "you shall find your camp ready when you are pleased to ride over to it."

"Humph!" snorted Phil. "Do you imagine, fellow, that I'm going to trust you around my camp again. Begone with you! But leave the camels and both the tents. When I return to the coast I will settle with you."

"Does his excellency no longer desire his servant?" whined Bojee.

"Nothing to do with you," Phil uttered. "Be gone, but leave the tents, the supplies and the camels. Try any tricks on us, and you shall pay for them thrice over. Now, why do you hesitate? Be gone, I tell you!"

Bojee hesitated no longer, but turned and went hobbling off over the hot sand.

"It'll take him half an hour to go less than half a mile," uttered Vance.

But Phil did not hear. He had turned, suddenly, to



stare at a figure on horseback that had left the slave caravan at a flying gallop.

Behind that one horse and rider rode a dozen Arabs, shouting and firing their rifles in the air.

"Professor," quivered our hero, "turn your telescope on that outfit and see what it's all about."

Rapidly Briggs swung the tube around.

"Why, bless me, bless me!" trembled the professor. "As I live it's a white girl who rides that leading horse!"

"A white girl—on the Arabian desert?" blurted Phil Winston in wonder.

"By the Prophet's beard, my white slave girl!" throbbed the slave sheik, straightening up and peering with one hand shading his eyes. "Oh, but my fleet horsemen will catch her!"

"Will they?" demanded Phil Winston, hotly.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE FLIGHT OF THE WHITE SLAVE.

"They'll catch her, will they?" panted Phil again, sinking to one knee. "Professor, be good enough to keep your eye on the sheik! Vance, help me get a sight on those pursuing horses!"

"What would you do, you dogs of infidels?" cried the slaver, his eyes blazing.

But Professor Briggs turned one of the automatic carbines on the dusky fellow, and he drew back, hesitating.

"Do?" echoed Phil. "We're going to shut off the pursuit of that white girl."

"But she's a slave!" quavered the sheik. "My property."

"If she's a white girl, she's no man's property!" rang Phil's voice. "Blaze away, Vance! Try to shoot a horse at a time until they stop the pursuit. Don't hit the girl!"

Spit! spit! went the automatics. With ten shots or so three of the foremost horses in the chase dropped.

The slave sheik, held back by the treacherous-looking muzzle of the professor's weapon, yet cried out:

"Stop! This is a savage crime—to rob me of my slave!"

"It's a worse crime to have a slave—especially a white slave!" Phil ripped back.

But he and Vance had stopped shooting for the very simple reason that the pursuers had halted.

But the fugitive girl seemed to know where to look for friends on that vast desert.

She turned her horse's head straight toward the American party, riding with the skill of an accomplished horsewoman.

"My most precious slave—fit even for the Emir himself!" murmured the shocked slaver, aloud. "Oh, these are wild, wrong doings for the desert!"

"Watch the sheik!" ordered Phil, himself lowering his weapon and starting out over the desert on a run.

Girl and rescuer met.

She was dressed all in white, in a single loose, flowing robe, the garment of Arabia.

Around her head was a band of white. From behind a thick handkerchief fell down over her neck and shoulders.

From the front of the band depended a heavy white veil.

But this the young rider had thrown back some time before and she now reined in a score of feet from Phil Winston.

"Whew!" gasped the boy.

For he found himself staring, almost fascinated, at a wonderfully lovely face—the face of a white girl of the purest, highest type—the face of a European or an American.

"Parlez-vous francais?" she cried, tremulously.

French, eh? Phil shook his head.

"Only English and a little Arabic," he replied, in the latter tongue.

"Oh, then, we shall understand each other," smiled the girl, and the witching gleam in those pretty eyes set Phil's pulses to fluttering. "You are English?"

"No; American."

"Ah! But that is better!" she cried, laughingly. "I gathered from what the Bedouins around me said that you were white men. That was enough to make me feel that I should make no mistake in trying a dash for life."

"You haven't made any mistake," Phil declared, promptly. "You have found three Americans who will protect you with their lives. Not that I know how far that will go against all Arabia," he added, wistfully.

"I have brought great danger to you!" cried the girl, her eyes filling.

She had spoken coolly so far, but now her lips trembled.

From head to foot she trembled, and now the storm broke.

"You can hardly keep in saddle, you are so upset," hinted Phil. "Here, let me help you down to the ground, where my arm can serve you."

She thrust out one daintily-booted little foot for him to take.

"Boots, eh?" murmured the boy. "And those came from Paris, I'll wager. Then you've not been long with that infernal slaver?"

"But four days," replied the girl, as Phil helped her down and caught her in his arms. "Oh, it is a terrible story, but I shall tell it all to you soon. Just now all I can do is to realize that I am free—for an hour, at least!"

Phil took the bridle of her horse with one hand, reaching out his other arm for her to lean on.

In this fashion they returned to the waiting group, the slave sheik glaring on with eyes that spoke danger.

"Mademoiselle," whispered Phil, in her ear, "if you will favor me with your name——"

"Oh, how stupid of me! Well, then, my brave Ameri-



can, let me present to you the Mademoiselle Ermi Dauvannes."

"And I am Philip Winston, very much and devotedly at your service—to the death, if need be," the boy replied seriously.

Now he introduced to her Vance and the professor.

"And what becomes of my property?" demanded the scowling slaver.

"Sheik, I will speak with you onside, if you are ready," Phil returned.

The sheik moving aside, Phil followed out of ear-shot of the girl.

"At what did you value your slave, man?" demanded the boy.

"At eight hundred of the golden sovereigns of the Englishmen," replied the fellow, without hesitating.

Four thousand dollars! Winston began to get a higher idea of the cost of slaves in Arabia.

But he answered at once:

"It is not too much. The young woman is of my own white race. I will purchase her freedom from you."

"You carry that much money in the desert?" cried the slaver, his eyes gleaming curiously.

"Oh, no; but I will write you a bill of exchange, and will hand the money to you, or to whomever you name, when I return to the coast."

This did not cause the sheik any uneasiness or doubt. All white travelers are supposed, in Arabia, to possess wealth without limit.

"And I shall want another of your slaves," Phil went on, coolly. "A woman of middle age to wait upon this young Frenchwoman."

"I do not know that I have such another slave as you would want," hesitated the slaver.

"Your caravan doesn't move on until you find one," Phil snapped back.

"Then I shall do my best, excellency. In fact, if you allow it, I will ride back to the caravan myself."

"Good enough," nodded Phil; then added, drily:

"But of course no attempt will be made to move the caravan until you have brought back another slave."

"Nor until I have the bill of exchange in payment for this, my most valuable slave—the girl whom I had hoped to sell to the Emir himself," replied the sheik, with another peculiar gleam of his eyes.

Then, as the sheik regained his horse and rode back to his caravan, Phil returned to look well at Mam'selle Ermi.

Well worth the trouble of looking at was this captivating French girl.

She was a blonde of the purest type, a type that is fascinating to the dark-skinned Arabs.

Not more than sixteen and slight, yet rounded and moulded like a bit of rare statuary, Mam'selle Ermi looked, at one moment, the child, and then, at the next instant, the serious woman.

But either as child or woman she was beautiful to gaze

upon. Vance could not remove his gaze. The professor, who had remained a bachelor all his life, was now gazing covertly but wonderingly at that lovely, fresh young face.

"You are arranging to buy me?" she asked, making a laughing pout as Phil came back.

"Yes, mam'selle; but not with a notion that any sufficient price could be set," laughed the boy. "And with no notion that I own what I buy."

"And at what value am I held?" she demanded, turning serious again.

Phil named the price.

"Mon dieu! I am not sure that my friends can repay you."

"It will not be necessary for them to," the boy answered, adding under his breath:

"If it were a question of trade, I couldn't sell such a rare prize."

"But you must be both very rich and very gracious!" cried Mam'selle Ermi, wonderingly.

"You are a white woman. That is enough for me," Phil answered, simply. "Are there any other white women in that caravan?"

"Not another."

"It is hot here in the sun," murmured Vance, thoughtfully. "Bojee has nearly reached the camp now. Why not follow him?"

While Vance and the professor caught the horses, Phil assisted Ermi to mount again.

Now, as they started for the oasis, Mam'selle Ermi, as a matter of course, pulled her horse in at Phil's right hand and rode with him.

Her story was simple enough. She was the daughter of a poor French physician, surgeon to one of the French Oriental steamers.

On the last trip she had been permitted to travel with her father.

Ashore at one of the Arabian towns hardly more than a week before, Ermi's beauty had been observed.

A street fight, in which the girl had been separated from her father, and then she was hustled away to a secret slave mart.

Four days before she had been purchased by the sheik of this caravan, a fellow named Gabban.

"And now my government must be making a pretty fuss about my abduction!" glowed the girl. "But poor papa! I wish he could know how safe I am at this moment!"

Safe? Phil realized, with a wrench at the heartstrings, that he was not so sure of that.

They were out on the great desert, with all Arabia against them!

Bojee and his men, according to orders, left the camels and camp equipment behind as they saw the American party approaching.

The tents were up, and all was ready.

Phil, helping Mam'selle Ermi down from the saddle,



led her to the better of the two tents, bowing low before her as they reached the door and he signed to her to enter the tent.

"This must be your home until we can reach the coast, mam'selle," he informed her. "Soon, I hope, the Sheik Gabban will be here with the slave woman who is to attend to your wants until you are safe with your friends once more. In the meantime, as always, command us."

"A woman to attend me?" cried Ermi, turning and showing a smiling, delighted face. "You think of everything! Oh, if it were not for papa I hardly think I should be in a hurry to leave this desert that has become so friendly."

Gabban quickly arrived now. He brought with him, on a camel, an almost coal-black slave woman, a Somali from the northern coast of Africa.

Ermi looked approvingly over this attendant.

A bargain was quickly struck now, including the price for Ermi's horse, for Phil was not disposed to haggle.

He signed the bill of exchange, after the professor had drawn it up in Arabic, and Gabban accepted it, though not without a strange flash in his eyes and a longing look toward the captivating French girl.

Then, as Gabban rode away, and Phil and his friends stood looking after the slaver, Winston turned to his chum with a smile.

"If Gabban tries to cash that bill of exchange before we get back to the coast, he'll be mad, Vance!"

"If he had only guessed that we're strapped!"

"Oh, but we won't be long!" cheered Phil. "A successful expedition, and then—maybe we'll be able to buy Arabia!"

"But if we don't succeed——"

"Then I'll fight for Mam'selle like a hound, anyway!" grated Winston, as he turned back to the tents.

After that there was enough to do.

It was not long ere all other travelers had faded past the horizon, and our adventurers had all of the visible desert to themselves.

And so night came down—a night on which Phil, his chum and the professor took turns in standing guard most vigilantly.

## CHAPTER VI.

### "AN ARAB NEVER FORGETS!"

"Wait here until the Emir comes. He has heard some strange words, and would speak with you."

That was the message, terse but courteous, which had been brought to them by a solitary horseman at daybreak on the day following.

"There's no choice but to wait, I guess," opined the professor.

"But what can be the meaning of it?" asked Phil, sharply.

"That we can only guess," replied Professor Briggs. "But the Emir is the governor of the district, and all must obey him, or refuse at their peril."

"What would happen if we pushed on?" insisted our hero.

"Oh, but we won't—we mustn't!" cried the wise man, uneasily. "We must obey the laws and the officials of even a wild country like Arabia. If we disobeyed, we would become outlaws, and the Emir could send bodies of horsemen after us to hunt us down. Not even our government could interfere then to protect us. No, no; we must wait!"

And so wait they had, and for a slow official indeed.

For there at this same oasis the American party had dallied for three hot days.

"If the Emir doesn't get enough speed on to show up here to-morrow," muttered young Winston, on the evening of the third day, "then we'll pull up stakes the day after to-morrow."

The professor sighed. On account of being the professor, he had expected, before the three left the United States, to be the leader in everything.

But out here on the desert Vance and our hero had settled it that Phil Winston was to be sole and unquestioned leader.

On the morning of the fourth day the professor was astir early, looking anxiously out over the desert.

"We go to-morrow, do we not?" chattered Mam'selle Ermi, thrusting her dainty head out of the door of the tent that she occupied with her black woman, Naga.

"If not to-day," Phil called back, his eyes twinkling.

"It will be much pleasanter to have our little caravan in motion again," smiled the French girl, and that settled Phil for a start in the very near future.

Breakfast was gotten ready by Naga.

Then Phil and Vance, by Ermi's invitation, seated themselves in her tent, while the professor remained anxiously on the watch.

"I think there's something coming, boys!" called Briggs's voice at last. "I make out horsemen approaching."

Horsemen who were traveling fast they were, too—a dozen or more of them riding at a canter over the sands, and still some three miles away.

Professor Briggs got his telescope into action.

"There's a small camel train coming along, some two or three miles behind the horsemen," he reported.

"Keep in out of sight, mam'selle," begged Phil. "It might not do for the Emir to set his eyes on you."

Shivering a bit, the girl withdrew into her tent.

The horsemen were coming on rapidly.

By the time that they were still a half mile away one of their number, dashing on ahead, reached the oasis.

"Prepare for the visit of his princely excellency, the Emir," called out the horseman, drawing rein close to the tents.

The messenger sat there in saddle, not moving.



"Do we have to throw ourselves on our faces before the Emir?" wondered Vance, aloud.

"Nothing of the sort," the professor informed them. "The Arabian Emir, while a great official and possessing great authority, is yet a very plain man among the Arabs, and any man may approach him if he does it respectfully. The Emir wears no robes or badge of authority. You will find him plain enough in every way, just like an American Governor."

And now the Emir's party rode up on some superb animals.

There could be no mistaking who was the Emir.

He rode at the head of his party of armed horsemen, easily the most distinguished man that the boys had seen in Arabia.

Not until they had reached the tents did the Arabs pull rein, and then they stopped their animals with a suddenness that would have unseated poor riders.

Phil's gaze was fastened on the mighty Emir.

He was a man of from thirty-five to thirty-eight, straight as a mast and more than six feet tall.

His skin was dusky, yet by no means black. His features were well-shaped and strong. His jaws had a firm set to them, which yet did not destroy a mild, courteous smile that his face usually wore.

This was Ali Abba, all except for his coal-black eyes, which had an intensely piercing expression whenever he looked intently at one.

His garb was the usual loose, long white robe, with the red morocco slippers and the headband with white cloth trailing behind over his neck.

"I rather like his looks," Phil murmured to his chum.

Then Phil Winston went forward as one of the Emir's men helped that official to dismount.

"If this is the Emir, His Excellency, Ali Abba," began Phil, using the words that the professor had taught him, "then His Excellency's servant bids the Emir welcome to this poor camp."

"You are the leader here, then?" asked the Emir, briefly, as he turned upon our hero.

"Even so, your excellency. Will you allow me to show you the way to our poor tent?"

The Emir followed into the tent, accompanied by three of his men.

He courteously took the seat that our hero offered him, the best there was, on a box.

"What do you in this desert of ours?" asked the Emir, crisply.

"We are but a scientist—a wise man—and two students," Phil answered. "We have come that we may view the stars from this desert."

"And you are one of the wise man's two students?" quizzed the Emir, glancing flashingly at our hero.

"Yes, your excellency," Phil answered promptly.

"Then, boy, how happens it that you are the leader here? Why does not the wise man lead his students?"

This was a poser, and a hard one that young Winston

had not expected. But he had to rise to the occasion, and at once.

"Good boy!" throbbed admiring Vance, under his breath.

"How far do you journey?" asked the Emir next.

"Perhaps sixty miles further."

"And then——"

"Then, your excellency, we study the stars for a few nights."

That sounded wholly reasonable and sensible, for the Arabs themselves are constant observers of the stars, though they do not possess telescopes.

"Will your wise man make me welcome, too, if I desire to study the stars with him?" asked the Emir, looking sharply at our hero.

This was the last thing on earth that Winston had expected or wanted. Yet there could be but one answer:

"If his excellency, the Emir, the great Ali Abba, honor us with his company, we shall then be happy indeed."

"Say," choked Vance under his breath, "I never knew Phil was such an expert liar!"

The Emir's face was as grave as ever as he replied:

"Perhaps, then, the wise one and yourselves will see me again before we leave the desert," announced the Emir.

"Good Lord, I hope not!" gasped Phil, under his breath, but what he said aloud was just the opposite.

Then, still looking at our hero searchingly, the Emir shot out:

"I have reports that you strangers have slain many horses and camels out here on the desert."

"Only when it was necessary, your excellency," Phil returned, uneasily, for there was an accusing look in the governor's still mild eyes. "But, your excellency, when men ride at us, firing their gups, and leading us to believe that we are in danger, is it not right that we should stop them by shooting their horses and camels?"

"Horses and camels are the wealth of Arabia," responded Ali Abba, drily.

"But should we not defend ourselves, your excellency?" insisted the boy, respectfully.

"Undoubtedly, if you were really in peril," rejoined Ali Abba. "But into that I can inquire when we meet again."

"Meet again?" quivered Winston to himself. "That's the very thing that I hope won't happen."

"See if my caravan is approaching," requested Ali Abba, turning to one of his followers.

"It is, illustrious one," replied the Arab, coming back.

Then to the professor the Emir turned, saying:

"In Arabia we know how to esteem wise men. Arabia was once the seat of nearly all the world's learning. So I have brought some more camels, more camp equipage and a dozen good men who will serve you as long as you remain on the desert."

Professor Briggs's face was a study.

Men of the Emir's were the last kind of people that



these Americans wanted around them at the Oasis of Ringmur.

"Your excellency does us too much honor," stammered the poor professor.

"Why?" demanded Ali Abba, fixing his intense gaze on the face of the professor.

"We are not of consequence enough," stammered the professor.

"All wise men are of consequence," replied the Emir, gravely. "And I cannot even think of permitting you to go out on the desert without a suitable guard. I would sooner, even, forbid your expedition, disagreeable as that would be for me."

"We are honored, indeed, your excellency," cried Phil, jumping into the breach. "And we thank you most heartily."

But to himself the boy added:

"We'll have to do some bully good thinking in the next two days to decide how to get rid of the escort."

"And now I must not detain you, since you have so far to go on your journey," went on the governor, gravely, and rising.

He moved toward the door, followed by Phil, who was profuse in his "thanks" for all the honor showed them by the illustrious governor of the district.

Espying the other tent, the Emir walked gravely to it, thrust aside the flap, looked in, then entered.

Ermi, catching sight of the official, uttered a short little scream, then tried to cover her face.

"Where did you get such a beautiful woman?" asked the Emir, turning to Phil.

"She is of our party," stammered Phil, growing hot and cold when he saw what admiring eyes this governor was turning upon the handsome girl.

"A slave, was she not?" asked Ali Abba, quietly.

It seemed that he must know all about the affair, so Phil answered truthfully.

"I will buy her from you," hinted the Emir.

"Oh, your excellency," cried Phil, his knees threatening to give way beneath him, "I beg you not to speak of it."

"You do not care to part with your slave?" demanded the governor, gravely.

"It would be the loss of the greatest treasure I have," protested poor Winston.

"Then we will speak of it later, as of some other matters," replied the Emir, in that same ominous way.

He stepped out of the tent now, hugely to our hero's relief, and signed for his horse to be brought up.

The Emir's caravan had just come up.

Four camels and a dozen mounted men he ordered detached from the caravan and left "at the orders," as he phrased it, of the strangers.

"You will find Hassan an excellent and trusty lieutenant," observed Ali Abba, indicating the leader of this dozen.

They were a mixed lot, these new guards, none of them pure Arab, and most of them very black.

But now the Emir was going, striking off to the south of them, while the way of our friends led westward.

Left by themselves, our three friends stepped back into their tent, then stood looking at each other.

"Up against it!" quavered Vance Carroll. "Not a move can we make, except under the eyes of the Emir's men."

"It's the only way we can go," declared Phil. "So we've simply got to make the best of it. As we travel, we'll think out our plans. We may—we must—find a way to beat the game! We'll do it, too—never fear. Yankee wits weren't made to be fooled by Arab trickery!"

With so many men at their orders a start was made almost at once.

Nightfall found our travelers at another oasis, with camp pitched for the night.

"We've got to mount guard among ourselves, just as before," Phil whispered to his comrades. "Both for Ermi's sake and our own!"

"But Hassan and his fellows may take offence," objected the professor, uneasily.

"They don't need to know that we've got a guard. We'll stay in our tent at night, but one of us must remain always awake during his trick at watching."

Two hours after sunset our friends retired. It was Phil's first trick at inner sentry duty. He sat on the edge of his cot, wide awake, with his automatic handy for instant use.

At eleven o'clock he called the professor softly for a two hours' tour of duty.

Briggs roused drowsily, then rose and sat on the edge of his cot.

Outside one of Hassan's men patrolled softly as sentry.

But still another of Hassan's men was astir on this quiet night.

He was a fellow wholly and utterly coal-black—in seeming. But his face was colored artificially, for, beneath the stain was the face of Bojee.

Twice this fellow stole to the tent-door towards midnight.

At the second peep Bojee was just in time to see Briggs nod, then roll over on to his cot.

Swish! Out flashed steel, as Bojee softly lifted the flap of the tent.

Phil and Vance were breathing heavily, the professor snoring.

"No truer words were ever spoken," grated Bojee to himself, as he crept forward, "than the saying that an Arab never forgets! This dog of an infidel had me bastinadoed—I, a sheik! I have not forgotten!"

With the knife raised, the assassin crept forward until he leaned over our sleeping hero.



## CHAPTER VII.

## WHEN ARABS SULK, BEWARE!

"Mon dieu! Monsieur Phil!"

Mam'selle Ermi's scream of terror rang through the tent—through the camp.

"It is murder!" screamed the French girl, as she saw flying forms in the tent.

For, at the first sound, the dozing professor had risen.

Seeing the Arabian-clad figure in the tent, he had leaped for it.

As for Phil, sleeping uneasily in that second, he had awakened just in time to see the flash of the descending knife.

There was but one thing to do—to wrench himself sideways and fall off to the floor between the cot and the wall.

And here his hand closed over his automatic rifle.

Professor Briggs, leaping to seize the fellow, was confronted by the wheeling, whirling Bojee.

Flash! The steel would have sunk in the professor's chest, but Vance Carroll was up and doing.

He caught at Bojee's wrist, and then ensued a fierce, wrenching struggle.

"Throw him down!" gruffed the professor, himself seizing Bojee from behind.

But in that brief twinkling of concentrated action the powerful Arab wrenched himself free of both of them.

The angry Arab's gaze was on frightened Ermi now.

She still stood in the doorway of the tent, quaking, shaking.

With a cry like that of a wild beast, Bojee, his eyes glaring with hatred, leaped forward to strike the long, slim steel into the girl.

It was Phil, leaping around the end of the cot, who stopped him.

Biff! smash!

In grand old American style Phil Winston's left fist shot out, catching Bojee under the jaw and sending him spinning.

Yet, in pitching headlong through the doorway of the tent, the fellow caught at the girl, carrying her out and down to the ground with him, though they fell three or four feet apart.

Roused by all the commotion, the Arab sentry of the camp came rushing to the scene, his rifle lowered ready to shoot.

But Phil, as he leaped through the door of the tent, had eyes only for Bojee.

That scoundrel, whom our hero still failed to recognize under that thick coat of black that was over his features, was reaching into his blouse for a weapon.

Swift as a flash the Arab had part of it out—the silver-mounted butt of a pistol.

There was but barely time to save Ermi.

Phil's automatic rifle sent out a fine, bright flash, and a fine, bright splash showed on prostrate Bojee's forehead.

The fellow lay still now, his nerveless fingers falling away from the butt of the half-drawn pistol.

Life was over for Bojee.

"You've killed one of our comrades!" cried the Arab sentry, turning his own rifle on Phil.

Crack! That Arab gun went off, but the bullet went harmlessly into the air, for once more Vance Carroll, with his great presence of mind, had been on the right spot at the right moment, and had struck the muzzle of the gun up into the air.

But now the whole camp was astir. Watchful Hassan came running from the tent which he shared with his men.

"What has been done here?" he demanded, angrily.

"I've shot one of your men who prowled in our tent with a knife, and who tried to harm the young lady," Phil replied, drily, as he straightened up.

He held Ermi by the hand after raising her.

"This is a strange tale," retorted Hassan, sulkily. "What would one of my men be doing in your tent?"

But Phil, who had turned to look down with a shudder at the man whom he had found it necessary to kill, suddenly bent over the fellow and rubbed his fingers over the face.

Some of the black came off.

"I understand," commented the boy, drily. "Wash this wretch's face until all the black is off, and underneath you will find the face of Bojee, the rogue whom I had to bastinado. He was in my tent after revenge."

"A strange tale," Hassan insisted, sullenly.

The other Bedouins had gathered around, looking on in scowling silence.

Vance, taking a hint from it all, nudged the professor, and both stepped back into the doorway of their tent, from whence they could use their automatics with greater ease if it became necessary.

"The Emir will not like this," declared Hassan, coldly.

But Phil was ready with his retort.

"Won't like it?" he echoed. "Of course he won't! He'll be angry enough at finding that one of his guards tried to murder me. But his excellency was not at fault, Hassan. Neither are you. You did not know that you had such a rogue among your men."

"But you do not seem to understand," retorted the lieutenant, in cold anger. "You, a dog of an infidel, have dared to kill a true follower of the Prophet."

The Arabs murmured wrathfully.

They would have followed Hassan's lead in an instant, wiping out the strangers.

But again Phil was ready:

"Now, Hassan," he cried, turning blazing eyes on the fellow, "you are a wretch yourself, since you have dared to call his excellency's guest a dog. If you open your mouth again I will kill you on the spot, as I did Bojee! Begone! Dare not speak to me again until you have re-



flected and repented. In the morning I may permit you to ask my pardon."

Hassan recoiled before this unexpected defiance.

Nor was the fellow quite sure to just what extent the Americans might be the favored guests of the Emir.

Hassan had his orders, to be sure, but those orders did not cover this present case.

"And begone, the rest of you," added young Winston, in a milder voice, as he turned to the other sullen Bedouins. "Since you have not shared Hassan's impudence to me, I do not hold you guilty as yet. But begone, and carry that carcass with you."

Sheer bluff and the determination to master carried the situation for the moment.

Yet there could be no telling how long this would last.

"Mam'selle Ermi," whispered the boy, as the Arabs turned and departed, "how on earth did you happen to see and give the alarm?"

"I could not sleep. I was uneasy. I knew not what about. But I looked out of my tent door, and I saw that fearful wretch stealing close to your door. Not knowing what was wrong, and not wishing to make trouble I followed softly in my bare feet. And then——"

"The rest I know, or can guess," nodded Winston. "And now—no more sleep for me to-night. I shall watch outside your tent, mam'selle. Sleep soundly, for you will be well guarded."

"It was all my fault," groaned the professor. "I was so stupid that I could not keep awake."

"With Bojee in the camp, it had to come some time," Phil rejoined. "I'm glad it came when it did, since it turned out well."

"The professor can get his sleep, anyway," smiled Vance. "The one on guard outside Mam'selle Ermi's tent can watch over both tents. And call me for the second trick, before daylight, Phil. I won't sleep on guard."

"I don't believe I ever shall again," muttered the mortified wise one.

As Phil walked softly back and forth before the door of the girl's tent he noted that the Arab sentry was no longer on his beat around the camp.

Instead, all of the Arabs had gathered in Hassan's tent.

There they were sulkily discussing the slaying of a comrade by a stranger, who was also an infidel.

The fellows were still sulky the next morning, though they attempted no open insolence.

"They're going to make trouble," predicted Professor Briggs, uneasily, as he watched the dusky men moving about their camp tasks before breakfast that morning.

"Then perhaps they'll be up against some trouble, too," smiled back Vance Carroll. "When it comes either to making trouble or meeting it, Phil Winston has a rare knack of his own, professor."

"But one boy can't beat all Arabia," sighed Briggs to himself.

The Arabs, though still serving the Americans, were sulkier than ever by late afternoon of the following day.

That was when the expedition reached the fringe of the Oasis of Ringmur—the hiding place of the kegful of marvellous diamonds!

## CHAPTER VIII.

### IN THE BLAZE OF GLORY!

The Oasis of Ringmur covered perhaps a half a square mile.

In the desert an oasis is a spot at which there is one or more wells of water.

On account of the water, there are also grass and trees.

Hence the traveler must seek out oases when crossing the desert.

Here he will find water for himself and beasts, and grass as well for the animals.

Here, also, in Arabia, he will usually find dates to help out his own larder.

Within a mile and a half of Ringmur was another and much smaller oasis.

In all, within sight, there were five oases near Ringmur.

"In olden times, there must have been a much larger fertile spot," declared the professor, looking around him with keen interest. "There may have been a tribe, or even a flourishing city here at one time, hundreds or thousands of years ago. But now this country is pretty well dried out."

"Are you going to dig for the keg to-night?" whispered Vance.

"Yes," nodded Phil. "Delay would be about the worst thing possible for us."

"I wish these infernal Arabs were a thousand miles from here!" gritted Vance.

"They're not going to stay here," retorted Phil. "I've settled that in my own mind. But, first, let them get our tents up."

"And I will call two of them to help me unpack the telescope," observed the professor.

"Sure thing," nodded Phil. "That fake is absolutely necessary, if we are to do any fooling at all."

So the professor got busy with his own pet instrument.

Vance stood by to direct the erecting of their tent and of the one that Ermi and her woman used.

Phil, in the meantime, still in saddle, and with his automatic hanging from the saddle handy to his right hand, rode over the eastern end of what was left of the Oasis of Ringmur.

The grass here was scant; there were but few date-palms. Even the well that had been here for hundreds of years was now almost dry and filled on top with scum and dead flies.

At the far western end of the oasis were the ruins of several ancient buildings.



Here at this eastern end stood only the ruined gateway of what must have been once a splendid palace belonging to the caliphs or rulers of Jokwat.

All traces of walls and foundations beyond the gateway had crumbled into white dust long ago.

Even this remnant of gateway looked as one good cyclone would settle it for good and all.

But Phil did not dare remain too long by this gateway, for it was within ten feet of that structure that he must dig to find the wonderful keg of diamonds.

"Hullo, I must stop that," mused the boy, sharply, as he turned to see what Hassan's men were doing now.

They were unloading their own big tent preparatory to putting it up.

"Hassan!" called our hero, sharply, as he rode down upon the men.

"Well, excellency?" queried the lieutenant, sullenly.

"Do not place your tent there."

"Why not?"

"Is it for you to question me?" blazed Phil, reaching for the automatic.

"You are not the Emir," sneered Hassan.

"But I am here with servitors of the Emir's supplying," retorted young Winston. "And as long as you serve me, you will also obey."

"I may choose to do neither," defied Hassan, his black eyes glowing like coals all of a sudden.

His sullen followers stopped work to watch what was happening.

"Then, when you serve, you will be no longer here," announced Phil. "For two days you and your men have acted more like sullen scoundrels than like men whom your Emir had sent to serve us. So I will have no more of you here. Choose one of the other oases nearby, and go to it. All of you! Begone!"

"Perhaps we shall have to learn who really is master here," snarled Hassan, all his Arab politeness fading as a cloak is cast aside.

"Then let us learn at once," proposed Phil, coldly, raising the automatic and taking clear aim at the lieutenant's breast. "Tell me who is master before I shoot!"

Phil's voice rang so clear and undisturbed, his eyes flashed so much as they had done after the shooting of Bojee, that Hassan weakened.

"I see," he muttered, surlily, "that I shall have to wait for the Emir to tell me who is master here."

"Wise man!" hailed Phil. "And, until the Emir has told you, take your crew and go to another oasis!"

Hassan turned away, conquered for the moment.

He signalled to his men, who, mounting and urging their own camels on, rode off the Oasis of Ringmur.

Phil sat in saddle, grimly, watching the Bedouins move away.

"It'll be a fight to the finish now," predicted Professor Briggs. "The breach has been made."

"We can stand off that dozen men with our automatics, if they attack us," said Phil, his jaw tightening.

"We may be able to defend ourselves here, lad, but we can never cross the desert in the face of hundreds of enemies. On this oasis we are as tightly bottled up as if we were behind bars. We may find the keg, we may find it to be as full of costly gems as your uncle stated, but we shall never reach the coast now with our plunder."

"One croak at a time, please, dear old Prof.," laughed the boy. "We haven't even found the keg yet, and this may not be the right place to look for it. My, but Naga's supper smells good!"

So they went over to the shaded space between the two tents where the folding table had been set up.

Mam'selle Ermi, smiling as ever, and with two flowers that she had picked in her hair, was waiting to preside over the table.

Darkness came swiftly on as the meal was being finished.

The professor, lighting one of his inevitable cigars, strolled slowly toward the ruined gateway.

Phil, trying to restrain his wild eagerness to get at the work of the night, strolled over to the telescope, pretending to look through it. It stood pointed at the heavens.

Vance peeped into the tent. His eager glance fell upon a pick and shovel that had made the trip hidden in the portly telescope case.

Ermi looked curiously after the three Americans. She had never been told the real object of their expedition, nor had she even asked.

Secure in the manly protection of these friends of the desert, she had been content with the friendship alone.

Naga, stolid, silent, heavy woman of fifty or more, who seldom spoke, had gone off to her couch as soon as the work of the evening was done.

"Ermi," whispered our hero, approaching the girl, who started at hearing the "mam'selle" dropped for the first time, "do you want to help us to-night?"

"Oh, can I serve?" thrilled back the girl, clasping her hands in delight.

"Your eyes are keen, Ermi. You can help us watch to-night, since at least two of us must do other work than watch."

"Oh, I shall watch, then!" glowed the girl. "And I shall prove my eyes to be as sharp as you think them!"

"If they were as bright as they look just now," uttered Phil, his pulses throbbing as he looked at her, "your eyes would light our every move and betray us to the Arabs."

"Oh, then there is mystery?" cried the French girl.

"Some!" Phil returned, drily.

"And romance?"

"If you can find it, dear girl!"

"And danger?" she insisted, clasping her hands tighter.

"More of that than I care to think of," the boy answered, moodily, as he wondered, with a sudden flush of anguish, what chance there was to get this superb—and, but for them, helpless—girl safely out of the desert.

"Oh, then I shall feel utterly at home to-night!" thrilled the girl, joyously. "There were many soldiers, many



brave old knights, in my family. Danger? I shall welcome it with you."

"Please heaven," murmured Phil, softly to himself, "there won't be enough of danger to recognize it for a welcome!"

"Who's going to watch, and who's going to dig?" questioned Vance, coming closer.

"I was thinking of having two dig," Phil replied, "but I've just changed my mind. Vance, your eyes and mine are sharper than the professor's, but he has muscle enough for the pick and shovel, if he takes the work slowly. You and I will sneak out in the dark, to watch that none of Hassan's rogues creep too close. And Ermi shall lie on the ground halfway between our posts, since she will be even safer there than in her tent. And the professor shall dig like a good fellow!"

Even Briggs agreed to this arrangement when he was called up and informed of it.

"When you strike the keg, professor," asked the boy, "give a low whistle, and we'll come in. And make all the haste you can, for the nights are short here."

Armed with pick and shovel, Professor Briggs hastened eagerly, feverishly to the spot where he and his young friends believed they were to find a big percentage of the wealth of the Indies.

Each at a distance of some two hundred yards from the spot where Briggs was to dig, Phil and Vance divided up the territory to be watched.

They did not stand or lie, but paced softly back and forth, with Ermi seated on the now cooler sand between their beats.

Only the softest plink! plink! came to their ears from time to time, for the old professor, wealth-crazy as he had grown within the last few hours, still realized the vast importance of digging without much sound.

The sky hazy and overcast, few of the stars showed.

It was not possible to see anything clearly at a distance of two hundred feet.

Yet Ermi never once tired of peering off into the darkness, nor once relaxed her vigilance.

Nor did she fear, for she knew that a slight cry would bring two staunch young Americans to her protection.

Once, toward midnight, Phil came softly toward her.

"Watch for just two minutes, Ermi," he begged, handing her the automatic. "I must see how our work is going on."

Clink! clink! The sound came from the shovel, making more noise than had been made before.

"Sh!" warned Phil, creeping closer to the hole that he now discovered at the spot beyond the gate mentioned in his uncle's manuscript.

Clink! clink! Phil crept close to the edge of the hole, above which Professor Briggs's head just showed.

"What's up, professor?" whispered the boy, as he bent over the hole.

"I wish these great slabs of stone were up!" grunted the professor, as he paused and wiped his forehead. "I

was just on the point of going after you lads. I've come to the slabs above the keg. I can't move these slabs alone. I'll have to have help!"

But there was no need to say more.

Phil was already bounding off as fast as he could go in search of Vance and Ermi.

"Come back! We're needed now," was his message.

"But our watch?" questioned Vance.

"We can't keep it up any longer, old chap, for if we do we can't get up the slabs. So hurry!"

The boys having spoken in English, Ermi looked on wonderingly.

But as they turned swiftly toward the scene of the professor's long labors, she understood that something critical was in the air.

And so they came upon Briggs. That learned gentleman had just succeeded in tossing all of the dirt away from the larger slab.

Vance brought ropes in a hurry.

With these they started the task of raising the slab.

It was both hard and awkward.

Laughingly, the girl added her tiny pulling power.

At last the slab was up. Then, after infinite but half-crazed, wildly eager toil, the second slab was up.

There, old and stained with age, lay a keg—the keg, beyond a question.

Nor did it seem to take the eager explorers more than a second to get this up on the face of the earth.

And now Vance ran tremblingly for a hammer and chisel.

"Don't be in too great haste," begged Phil, as Carroll started in to use the tools on the keg. "Remember that we don't want to smash the keg."

Clink! clink! plink! plink! plink! As the eager ones in fevered waiting held their breath, it seemed as if each light stroke with the tools made a sound like the discharge of a cannon.

Yet no one now thought of going on guard, or even of turning.

Then, at last, the head came out of the keg.

In the first moment a sigh of disappointment went up, for all that showed to their eyes was a mass of dried, rotted oasis grass.

But Phil excitedly plunged a hand down into the mass. He drew forth, in trembling fingers, a mildewed sack of canvas.

Fumbling, it took him a long time to untie the old string that was around the neck of the bag. There were only a few small bags filled with gems in the keg, but they were worth a big fortune.

Then, as he threw his helmet down on the sand and dumped the pouch into that headgear, four different cries of wondering admiration sounded.

Even in the darkness of that Arabian night they were gazing into a very blaze of glory!

Gems of the purest white rays, and larger than any that



any of them had ever seen, flashed fire into the black night.

"Diamonds!" breathed Ermi, in a very delirium of fascinated joy.

"Yes," breathed Phil, very low.

"Mon dieu! But what wonderful ones!"

"They once belonged to a great prince," Phil rejoined.

Then, gallantly, Phil pounced upon the largest, most glittering one in the lot.

"The first shall be yours, Mam'selle Ermi," he throbbed.

"And it is only the first of those that shall be yours!"

Then Professor Briggs, fond of money as a smoker is of the weed, seated himself tremblingly on the ground and drew into his lap Phil's glowing, glittering, beautiful helmet that he might better contemplate the sight.

"Wealth!" quivered the professor. "Wealth greater than we have ever troubled to think about before."

"Wealth, indeed," sighed Phil, ecstatically, "for here, beneath the grass, are still more pouches."

It was Ermi whose thoughts first came back to earth and the desert.

"Suppose we are being watched," she whispered, throbbingly.

"We're a pack of money-mad fools!" cried Phil, disgustedly, snatching his automatic and rising swiftly. "Hark!"

From over by their tents all these straining ears heard a sound.

"Whew!" Like a shot Phil Winston was off.

He was in time to see the garb of a woman flutter as it floated swiftly away from the tents.

"Halt, whoever you are!" he called, in a low, thrilling voice.

But the white sped on in the blackness.

"Stop, or I fire!" challenged the boy.

But Ermi, dashing up behind him, quivered:

"It is that wretched Naga! She has left her tent!"

"We can't shoot a woman!" quavered Phil. "We've got to catch her before she talks to anyone, for she must have seen what we were doing. Come on, Vance—speed!"

Momentarily they had lost sight of the fleeing white figure in the great blackness beyond.

But now, as they darted forward, the sharp rat-tat of a horse's heels came to their ears.

"Off on a horse—the wretch!" faltered Phil, stopping short. "Too late! By the time we could get on our own horses and pursue she'll be at the camp of Hassan!"

"Was she a spy?" quivered Vance, his eyes flashing with wrath.

"Hassan must have known how to make one of her!" throbbed our hero. "Vance, we've got to fight for our treasure now—and fight like grim death!"

"Oh, we'll do it!" uttered Carroll.

"At least, back to your treasure, eh, my friends," broke in Ermi, sweetly, coolly. "That, at least, is the best place to be when you must defend it."

Back they stole to where Professor Briggs still sat on

the ground, with the helmet in his lap, staring rapturously at the glowing, marvellous bits of pure, hard stone.

"Now, for the watch and fight!" sighed Phil. "Oh, for daylight, to see what we have to fight! There is so much treachery lurking in the dark night!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE EMIR TROUBLES HIMSELF!

"Be careful, won't you, Mam'selle?" implored Phil, anxiously.

For the French girl was now walking nervously back and forth, and ever increasing the length of her distance from the great hole from which the marvellous keg had been lifted.

It was still dark.

Phil, Vance and the professor, out at three different points, formed a triangle of protection for their great treasure.

There were yet two hours of dark.

The last hour of dark would be more than enough time for them to do all that remained to do there by the ruined gate.

So the immediate hour was to be spent in watching and trying to learn whether Naga's treacherous flight was destined to bring down Hassan and his crew of Bedouins.

"It's not wise to go too far beyond us, Ermi," called the boy, in a low tone that was hoarse with downright anxiety.

"Oh, I shall not get beyond your seeing and hearing me," the girl responded in a penetrating whisper. "I—oh, mon dieu!"

For Ermi was now just far enough away from our hero to have fallen into the strong arms of a dusky Bedouin who had sprung up from out of the darkness at her feet and seized her.

"Good Lord! It's about all in for us!" gasped Vance. But to that Phil gave little heed.

Snatching up his rifle, he darted toward the girl, who was struggling in the Arab's grasp.

"Here! Let go of the young lady!" Winston roared, letting the muzzle of his automatic fall so that he covered the man.

Swish! With a quick jerk the Bedouin had Ermi between himself and the boy.

There was the flash of steel in the air, and Ermi, strangled almost insensible by the Arab's dark hand, lay helpless against his shoulder.

"Shoot, and the girl dies!" jeered the fellow. "And stand back, too, if you wish her to live!"

Gasping, trembling, Winston obeyed.

He was afraid to shoot—afraid that Ermi would stop the bullet intended for her assailant.



Then, while our hero hesitated, the Bedouin raised his voice in a loud cry that carried far over the desert.

Answering it came a rumble, faint at first, but growing gradually louder as it came nearer.

"Don't choke the girl to death," implored Phil.

"Not if you put your rifle on the ground and go back," hinted the Arab.

Phil started, in a new thought of terror.

"And your other friends must bring their rifles out and lay them on the ground with yours," smiled the Arab captor of Ermi.

Phil swiftly began to understand.

They must surrender and become prisoners, if Ermi's life was to be spared.

But would the fellow keep his threat?

Phil groaned with the awful suspense of the thing.

From what he had learned to know of Arabs, this fellow could be relied upon to kill Ermi if it became necessary.

"Your gun down at once, or I stab!" insisted the Arab captor of the now unconscious girl.

He raised his knife.

Phil could hesitate no longer.

Down went his automatic and lay there on the sand.

"Your friends must do the same," jeered the Arab.

"Shall I, Phil?" called Vance.

"Old fellow, I'm afraid you must, if we are to save Ermi."

Manfully, without a sigh for the treasure they were giving up, Vance marched out and lay his weapon beside Phil's.

Professor Briggs hesitated.

He was older than the boys, and had learned to love wealth better.

"But it's no use trying to fight, without the help of the youngsters," he quickly decided. Then he marched out, adding his rifle to the others.

And now the three friends stood back, close to the hole that they had dug.

For the first time Phil began to pay heed to the ever-increasing roar on the desert beyond.

"Horsemen," he groaned, "and a big body of them. Oh, we have been cleverly trapped!"

The Arab who had captured Ermi now moved forward with her and stood close by the surrendered guns, one of which he picked up.

And now, out of the night, the horsemen came thundering up to the spot. There were some forty of them.

"What, my good fellow?" cried their leader, delightedly. "You have already subdued the enemy alone?"

The speaker was Ali Abba, the Emir of the district.

"Oh, it was not difficult, your excellency," smiled the fellow. "I had nothing to do but to get the girl in my arms and threaten her with my knife."

"Do these strangers care so much for the life of one woman?" demanded the Emir, wonderingly.

Now several of the horsemen dismounted, surrounding

our friends, who, from the uselessness of the case, offered no resistance.

"Bind them," ordered the Emir, simply.

It was rough treatment that followed. Without ceremony the three Americans were thrown down and bound securely.

While this was going on the Emir commanded:

"Bring the girl before me!"

So Emir was led before him. She was conscious again now, and the terror in her great, wide eyes, with the death-like pallor in her face, made her ten times more lovely than before.

The Emir looked at her calmly, but with evident admiration.

"She is a charming woman," he said, gravely. "See that she does not escape. She shall grace my own household."

At this terrifying announcement Ermi's shriek rang on the air, and Phil, for the first time, regretted that he had not been merciful enough to slay her when he had had the chance.

"Now, let us go forward to the old gateway," suggested the Emir to his companion.

These two rode. Others of the Arabs followed, but on foot, while by far the greater number remained behind with the horses.

Slowly, thoughtfully, the Emir rode around behind the gate. Here he and his companion dismounted also.

Then, as grave and calm in their manner as if they were merely on a visit of official inspection, they walked back to where the hole had been dug.

But Ali Abba started when his eyes rested on the keg, lying not far from the hole.

"Then it was not a wild, imaginative tale that Bojee sent me, after he had listened to the talk of the foreigners," murmured Ali Abba. "The keg exists! It is here. And mine, now!"

Next the Emir turned to look at the prisoners, who had been brought forward.

"So, youth, you thought to rob me of this prize?" he demanded, fixing his stern gaze on Phil.

"Could I rob your excellency of what you never possessed?" Phil demanded.

"There you are wrong," replied the Emir, gravely. "All taxes and all found treasure in this district belong to me. It is our custom—our law. So you have tried to rob me. And how horrible was the crime! For here, my property, is a keg with priceless diamonds!"

A hoarse murmur rose from the listening Arabs.

"My children," went on Ali Abba, speaking to his people, "you have always known me for a just ruler. I shall be just now."

He made a sign to two of his men, who grabbed Phil and bore him forward to the brink of the deep hole.

"He has dug excellently well," sneered Ali Abba. "Really, the youth should have some reward. So, since we must keep the keg, let him have the hole for himself!"



At another sign the two men started to lower our hero. All in an instant Phil realized that this was no grim jest.

He was to be buried alive!

## CHAPTER X.

### THE RIGHT SORT OF GIRL.

Chug! Half fainting with the fearful horror of the thing, Phil Winston landed on his back at the bottom of that stifling hole.

He had not protested. There had not been time.

Nor would it have been of any use.

The Arab is one of the politest men alive, but with all his polish he is at heart a cruel savage.

"I wonder if the rest have got to be buried down here with me?" throbbed the boy. "Father in Heaven, grant not!"

Above he heard the Emir's still calm voice:

"My children, will you advise your Emir? We have dropped the leader of these foreign thieves into his grave. Shall we send the others after him?"

"Oh, no, no! Not that!" quivered the terrified boy.

But he kept the words under his breath.

To have pleaded aloud at such a time, and with a man as firm and hard as the Emir, would have been to condemn his friends.

While the Emir paused for the reply, which his men would think over carefully before giving, a softer voice sounded:

"Oh, if the Emir be a thoroughly just man, let him listen to me!"

It was the voice of Ermi Dauvannes, her voice growing in strength and courage as she went on:

"Let every man remember that a woman was his mother. Let no man call himself just, nor even brave, if he refuses to give ear to the voice of a woman in trouble!"

"Good girl!" throbbed listening Phil. "But she can do nothing to soften the heart of this pirate. An Arab does not hold women in high enough respect to listen softly to one."

"What would the girl say?" asked the Emir, slowly.

"Let her come here if she will be brief."

So Ermi was led before the Emir.

"You have spoken of your justice," Ermi began, faltering now that the dark, searching eyes of the Arab governor were fixed searchingly on her fair young face. "If you really possess that justice, I ask you for some of it."

"And what have you to do with mercy?" queried the Emir, slowly.

"You have said that I am to be taken to grace your household," faltered the brave little French girl.

"It is even so, child."

"Then I may hope that you would do something to bring pleasure to my heart?" asked Ermi, looking straight at this powerful man.

"If it be anything reasonable, child."

"Is it not reasonable then, oh, your excellency, for me

to ask for the lives of my friends—for the lives of those who have befriended me?"

"But is it reasonable, woman, that I should grant their lives, after they have tried to rob me of what our law says is mine?" insisted the Emir, coldly.

"Have these strangers done your excellency any harm?" demanded the girl.

"They tried to. Only the faithfulness of my people prevented."

"But they would not have profited, even had your excellency not come here," cried the girl.

"Not have profited?" demanded the Emir, showing the first signs of anger. "They would not have profited, had they reached the world's markets with that keg of diamonds?"

"Yet your excellency does not know that these strangers—my dear friends!—found that which they sought."

"That can soon be determined," replied the Emir, wondering.

Calling to two of his men, he commanded them to open the keg.

This they did with infinite care that, in the opening, not one of the precious gems should be spilled.

While the fellows were thus engaged, Ali Abba stood by looking impassively on, nor giving a single glance at the tearful girl.

At last the keg was open.

Then, despite all his gravity and repose, Ali Abba started forward with a low cry.

Stand back, my children," he ordered.

Down on his knees he dropped, thrusting his own hands into the keg.

All he brought out was sand.

Uttering a cry of disappointment, he thrust in his hands again.

But still sand—and only sand!

"What hoax is this?" demanded the Emir, starting up, his face gray and drawn. "Where are the priceless diamonds of India?"

"There were none," declared Ermi, boldly. "Great prince, if you have been deceived, so have these strangers, my friends. They have suffered from the hoax more than you, for have they not traveled half way around the world in search of the same keg? And truly, the keg was there, yet it contained only sand—a cruel hoax indeed on the part of him who wrote the manuscript!"

But the Emir, though half-dazed by disappointment, was wholly suspicious.

"Have that dog thrown up out of the hole," he commanded, harshly. "I would question him."

Two of the Arabs leaped down into the hole. They quickly lifted our hero to the surface, where other hands stretched forth to place him on his feet before the Arab governor.

"Now, if you would know mercy in this life, or in the life beyond," adjured Ali Abba, fixing his stern eyes on the boy's calm though white face, "speak the truth."



"That I have always done," Phil returned, coolly.

"Where are the diamonds that you found here?"

"We did not find any, your excellency."

"You lie! You are a dog!"

"Then I cannot answer your excellency, since a dog can only bark."

"Where are the diamonds?" roared the governor.

"I have assured your excellency that we did not find any. That the keg contained only what you have found yourselves."

"Search the dog," commanded the Emir, turning to his men. "And search the other prisoners."

Roughly enough the three Americans were thrown to the ground, and still more roughly they were handled in the search that followed.

"Have one of our women brought to search this pretty child," the Emir commanded.

Away went one of the Arabs, scurrying on his horse.

It was nearly half an hour ere the fellow returned, accompanied by an Arab woman mounted on a camel.

Phil and his friends, in the meantime, had been lifted to their feet again, the search of their clothing proving worse than useless.

But now our hero fairly throbbed with torment as he saw the Arab woman approach Ermi and begin the search.

For, all the time, the French girl had been so closely watched that she had had no chance to cast the diamond away unobserved.

Five anxious minutes passed. Then the Arab woman reported:

"Most just and generous Emir, this young woman possesses nothing of the kind that I was ordered to find."

"What? The woman dear to this stranger's heart has no gems? That is strange, for women always snatch for these baubles. By the beard of the Prophet, I begin to suspect that they really may have found no gems."

"May I speak, your excellency?" requested Phil, in a very respectful tone.

"Even so, if you have aught of interest to say."

"I wished only to beg your excellency to have all our belongings searched as thoroughly as we have been. Then it will soon be seen that we have no such gems as you imagined."

"Let their things be searched, then," ordered the Emir. "Search their tents, their boxes, their containers of food, their blankets—even that great leather box yonder!"

He pointed to the long, broad case in which the telescope had been carried.

"May not my friends have their hands freed, that they may help in the search?" pleaded Ermi.

"It can do no harm," nodded the Emir, "since my people will kill the dogs if they dare to play us strange tricks."

It was with huge relief that Phil, Vance, and the professor found themselves again able to use their bodies.

But the professor watched anxiously as the Arabs went toward his beloved telescope.

"Oh, your excellency," pleaded the professor, "a great favor!"

"Speak, wise men," commanded the Emir.

"I have only to ask," went on the professor, meekly, "that rude hands do not injure that instrument, which is one of the greatest value to the wise, who are trained to see and to think."

"But even that wonderful, star-gazing instrument of yours must be searched," protested the Emir.

"Yet, your excellency, it will make a vast difference if I am allowed myself to take that priceless instrument of learning to pieces and show you the empty parts. I can do it all before your own watchful eyes. Surely, it is not much of a boon that a man of wisdom asks at the hands of a great ruler!"

"Be it even so, then," replied the Emir, almost gently. "You shall take the great instrument to pieces, while I look on."

Under the direction of the professor the boys quickly had the telescope out of the case, and lying on the sands, while watchful Arabs clustered around.

"First," announced the professor, "I will take out the eye-piece."

He unfastened and drew out a long cylinder of brass, with a heavy lens fitted at either end.

"And how do you take the glass away from the ends?" demanded the Emir.

"Oh, that is never done, your excellency," the professor assured him, lyingly. "Your excellency must know that it is a solid piece of glass that runs through this brass tube."

"It is even so," admitted the Emir, gravely, after due thought. The governor, like many another great man in other lands, did not care to admit or display his ignorance before his people.

After that it was easy. Professor Briggs displayed other eye-pieces in their separate boxes, and also the great object glass at the larger end of the telescope.

Then, half in a daze, but trembling with happiness, Professor Briggs was allowed to replace his telescope and its parts.

"We have searched everywhere now," cried the Emir, disappointedly. "And there are no gems, unless these foreign dogs have buried them beneath the sands of the desert."

But his own men had already searched far, and now reported that they had been unable to discover any signs of recent digging.

"And now, merciful Emir," cried Ermi, casting herself on her knees before the governor, "since my dearest friends in the world have done no harm, you will show that you are really just? You will let them go?"

"But they tried to wrong me, even if they have not succeeded," cried Ali Abba.

"Why did they do wrong, your excellency," insisted Ermi, "when, in case they had found what they sought, it



was their intention to tell you all and to show you the gems?"

"That is a silly story," sneered Ali Abba.

"Look in my face, excellency! Search my eyes, and tell me if they are the eyes of a woman who lies?"

"Whew!" throbbed Phil.

But the Emir, now that his first disappointment was past, seemed to take a more kindly view of matters.

"What, then, child, if I permit your friends to go?" he demanded.

"Then shall I be grateful to you all my life!" promised the girl, eagerly.

"And always strive to make my household pleasant for me after I marry you when I return from my journeys?" queried the Emir, half-smiling.

"Gladly, your excellency!" promised the girl, her voice almost imploring. "Only set my friends free."

But Phil was at her side now, seizing her almost angrily by the shoulder.

"This is madness, Ermi," he whispered. "Do you think we would purchase our liberty at the expense of seeing you go into this man's harem as his wife?"

"But I must go, anyway," retorted the girl. "Whatever you feel, or whatever you do, you cannot hinder that or save me from it."

They both spoke in Arabic, the only language that the young people had in common. The Emir heard them, and laughed, turning to the official with him to whisper something.

That instant was enough for Ermi to whisper swiftly in our hero's ear:

"Take your lives and freedom on any terms! Do you believe in woman's wit? Then trust me to use mine in joining you again."

So Phil Winston stood back, bowing in resignation.

"Well, my pretty child," smiled the Emir, "since it will make you happier, and will cause you to smile more pleasantly upon me, your friends shall have their lives and their freedom."

"And their horses and camels, and their supplies?" begged the girl, swiftly. "Else how shall they reach the coast alive?"

"They shall have those things, child."

"And their firearms? Else how shall they protect themselves against the thieves of the desert?"

Ali Abba hesitated.

"Their rifles are infernal," he grumbled. "My people can bear witness to that."

"But they are only three, and you command an army, at need," urged the girl. "Surely, Ali Abba does not fear three strangers."

Flushing a bit at the taunt, Ali Abba quickly gave in.

Dawn was coming, as he ordered the horses of the Americans and two camels brought up.

"Now, take leave of your friends, pretty one!" jeered the Emir. "They are starting at once."

Phil caught Ermi's hand in his, sank to his knees, and imprinted a kiss there.

"Find the way to join us, and swiftly," he found chance to whisper, "or else we shall risk all and come back for you."

"Trust me. I shall be with you soon," the gritty French girl whispered back. Then she turned to offer her hand to the other Americans.

Then out on the desert started the three Americans, this time without guards, guides, or helpers, and, what was infinitely worse—without Ermi!

## CHAPTER XI.

### "HIGHWAY ROBBERY" TO GOOD PURPOSE.

"There comes a horse now!" panted Vance Carroll.

"By the great flag, then, it must be Ermi!" uttered Phil, wheeling about in his saddle.

Yes; there came a fleet Arab horse, tearing over the wide sandy plain.

"There starts the pursuit!" throbbed our hero, a few seconds later, as he saw nearly a dozen flying horsemen detach themselves from the Emir's caravan, now nearly three miles distant.

"Can she reach us?" quivered Vance.

"She'll reach us," vented Winston, "if there's any such thing as justice in the world."

By keeping their own horses at a wild gallop, they rapidly lessened the distance between themselves and the fugitive.

But now Phil discovered something else that filled him with uneasiness.

It looked like a woman who was riding toward them, ahead of the pursuing horsemen.

But this woman wore a brownish robe. Ermi's was white!

"Hold up, now!" shouted Phil, reining in hard. "We can drop some horses now, if we don't let anxiety spoil our aim!"

Down in the sand, each on one knee, they fired swiftly at the pursuing horses.

"One down!" gritted Phil, presently.

"Another to keep the first company!" smiled Vance.

And so, while the remaining horsemen hesitated, still out of range with their own old-style muskets, the fugitive came rapidly toward our young friends.

"My brave Americans!" thrilled a clear young voice, carrying far on that hot, dry, still desert air. "Did I not say I would come?"

"It's Ermi—glorious girl!" chuckled Phil, almost delirious with joy.

"Easy, old fellow! Steady!" counselled Vance. "Those riders are starting forward again."

"Then drop every horse you can hit, whether they stop or not," commanded Phil Winston. "Every horse you can hit now is one less on which to follow us. For this chase is going to last all the way to the coast!"



Then, indeed, did the automatic rifles sputter forth unceasingly for a few moments.

Then, to their joy, the boys saw the last of the Arab horses go down—the riders of the last three having turned in flight.

And now Ermi was near enough for them to see her face. In another twinkling she had reined up, and they looked into her spirited eyes.

She bent down just a moment. Phil daringly, though instinctively, kissed her.

Then Ermi straightened up, flushing hotly.

"The diamonds? They are still safe?"

"Still safe," smiled Phil, nodding over at the great telescope case on the back of one of the camels.

"Oh, how my heart was in my mouth while those Arabs clustered around the telescope!" fluttered the girl. "But they never suspected!"

"Never a suspect!" laughed Winston, gleefully. "And I never before guessed how many quarts and quarts of anything could be hidden between the lenses of an objective-piece of a telescope. Why, we could have hidden two quarts more of diamonds in there if we had them."

The work of hiding the diamonds inside the brass cylinders of the telescope's eye-pieces had been carried on in the long interval of waiting for daylight, after the treacherous flight of the serving woman, Naga.

And so our friends had their precious treasure—with an offset in the shape of the watchful, following Emir.

For the next half hour there was no sign of pursuit.

Then four Arabs rode forward, one of their number fluttering a white cloth from a lance-stick.

"Take no chances," uttered Phil. "You, Vance, wait and drop those horses."

This Vance accomplished.

"And now we'll forge forward at our best speed," cried Phil, as Carroll returned.

By four o'clock in the afternoon, on horses that were well-nigh ready to drop, our friends reached an oasis, with Ali Abba probably at least a dozen miles to the rear, since his caravan was nowhere in sight.

"Why, there's a caravan there ahead of us!" groaned Phil, drawing rein while still three-quarters of a mile from the oasis.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Vance, wonderingly, for Phil was sighting his automatic.

"See those camels?" queried our hero.

"Seven of them grazing. Yes."

"Watch what happens!"

There was a tiny little puff of smoke at the end of Jack's automatic. One of the camels at the oasis dropped. Then up popped half a dozen Arab heads.

"There's great excitement there," grinned Vance.

Phil fired twice more, bringing down a second camel at the third shot.

"Here comes a fellow, riding like mad, and with a white flag!" chuckled Vance.

"For what reason do you foreign dogs fire, with such

long-range guns, on the harmless caravan of the Sheik Wira?" he demanded.

"Are you the Sheik Wira?" Phil demanded.

"Even so."

"Good enough! I want to talk with you, sheik, for you look like one destined to win wealth out of the battle of life! Ride to one side with me."

Wonderingly, the Arab rode away with our hero.

Then, after a long talk, Phil held up one hand as a sign to his own people to move on toward the oasis.

Phil, moving ahead with the Sheik Wira, was there at the Arab camp to receive them.

"It's all right," chuckled Phil, as he drew his friends around him. "Wira is just the sort of chap I thought him to be—a regular desert pirate who cares not a whit for Ali Abba so long as he can keep out of the Emir's clutches. Wira is a half outlaw, as near as I can make out, and he and his fellows are crazy to get out of Arabia, and across the Red Sea into Africa. I've promised to take him through with me, if he'll serve me. And I've promised him and his men big bills of exchange on the bankers. That part is all right. These Arabs believe that all white men have enormous bank accounts."

"Do you mean to say that those fellows are going to escort us—and what we've got with us?" demanded the professor, tremulously, as he glanced sideways at the Arabs, to whom Wira was now talking.

"They'll do what's even better," promised Phil.

"What?" asked the professor, doubtfully.

"They'll help us hold up any caravan we meet, and help us to make the caravan give up fresh horses and camels. We'll give the caravan people bills of exchange. That goes the same as money in this hot old country. And all the bills of exchange will be made good when we get our possessions to market. So no harm will be done anywhere."

\* \* \* \* \*

Phil's wild plan proved to be simplicity itself.

Eight caravans they met on the way, and all had horses and camels that could be taken.

For these our hero gave bills of exchange.

Throughout the journey Wira and his fellows, lured by the promise of great reward, proved faithful.

Just before dark on the fifth day Phil Winston, at the head of his little caravan, rode down the slope of the last coast range.

Now, half a mile further on, white, hot, and quiet, lay the little Arabian seaport town of Falwahr.

In the harbor lay three vessels flying foreign flags.

"Safe in less than an hour," Phil smiled, as he reined up and waited for Ermi Dauvannes. "We can bribe skippers to hoist anchor and sail at once!"

"And with what will you bribe them?" hailed a laughing voice in Arabic.

From out of a grove at their right hand rode an Arabian officer.

"What do you want?" Phil demanded, eyeing the officer



curiously, and catching his first glimpse, now, of a company of native cavalry in the shadows of the grove.

"His excellency, the Emir, Ali Abba, has asked me to detain you until he comes," smiled the officer, politely, as his men rode out and around the now frightened party.

## CHAPTER XII.

### CONCLUSION.

Professor Briggs nearly fell out of his saddle in a faint. Not so with Phil Winston. After the first great jump of realization he was as ready as ever.

"What did the message say?" Phil asked the officer.

"That you strangers were wanted for high crimes, and that I was to hold you and all your baggage until his excellency arrived."

"Then nothing was said about the diamonds!" thrilled the scheming boy to himself. "Thank goodness for that. Oh, if I can only think up something fresh and bright!"

He was smiling still when he next spoke to the officer.

"Twas a mean way that his excellency took to win the wager, and I shall not pay it when I see him."

"That, of course, is no concern of mine," replied the officer, gravely.

"Of course not. And we are your prisoners. But one thing I must impress upon you, faithful servant of the Emir."

"What is that?"

"We are people of distinction."

"I have no doubt of that," replied the officer, bowing gravely.

"Therefore we must not be locked up in any common, filthy prison while we are waiting the coming of the Emir. You must take us to your own quarters, and do the best you can for us. Fear not; we shall be able to pay well for all the accommodation that we ask of you."

Every Oriental government official is a born grafter. This Arab officer, having no doubt that these foreigners were wealthy, scented a fine opportunity to line his wallet.

So he took them to his own quarters, providing even for Wira and the latter's men.

"Do you enjoy serving in the Emir's cavalry?" Phil queried, simply.

The officer shrugged his shoulders.

"There is not much honor—and no money!" he grumbled, shrugging his shoulders.

"There are other and better countries than this," hinted Phil. "Turkey, for instance, is a country where you could reap great honors, and live like a prince, if you have a little money saved."

"But I have not," murmured the Arab officer.

Then, as soon as he could, Phil Winston sent out warning looks that caused his friends to leave him alone with the officer.

Money is a great power throughout the old East!

A poor Arabian official is sometimes easily tempted!

Just after dark that night the American party and

Ermi, with Wira and his wild men, and last, if not least, the Arab cavalry officer himself, went aboard a British bark in the little harbor.

Anchor was weighed within another hour.

By morning the bark had crossed the Red Sea, and was skirting the coast of Africa on its way up to the Suez Canal.

Not until a trustworthy banker was reached at Port Said did Phil show any of his diamonds. Then enough money for immediate needs was raised.

The Arab officer who had aided the escape was paid all the bribe money promised. Wira and his men were rewarded and dismissed.

It was in Paris that many of the diamonds were disposed of, making all four of our friends richer by far than they had any need to be.

Ermi, reunited to her fond old father, objected to taking her share, but all three of the Americans forced it upon her.

"Here's an odd receipt that I have, Ermi," Phil told the French girl one day when he called upon her at her handsome new home in Paris. "It's the receipt of the slaver from whom I bought you."

"Then I owe you the amount," smiled the girl.

"Do you think I'd sell?" demanded Phil Winston, indignantly.

He didn't either, and there was no need to, for Ermi was as willing to become Mrs. Winston as our hero was crazy to have her do so.

Vance, in his travels, found and won the prettiest and jolliest kind of Western girl in the United States.

Just now the two young couples are restless, jovial, happy globe-trotters, enjoying their money.

But they keep out of Arabia!

Professor Briggs has retired from teaching. He keeps bachelor hall in a handsome old house in Washington, in a dome on top of which he has mounted his huge telescope.

### THE END.

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